

When a New Yorker Made a Second Trip to the White House

By Maury Thompson

Native New Yorker Donald Trump is seeking to become the first U.S. President to win election to a second non-consecutive term since another New Yorker did it in 1892.

Grover Cleveland was a former mayor of Buffalo and New York governor. He was both the 22nd and 24th President, serving from 1885 to 1889 and from 1893 to 1897. And he had an important and generous supporter in Glens Falls, N.Y.: Lumber and banking executive Jeremiah W. Finch.

“Probably President Cleveland has no stauncher friend or admirer than J.W. Finch, a prominent banker and lumber manufacturer at Glens Falls, N.Y.,” the *Washington Post* reported. “He has an enormous sawmill, is a large manufacturer of lime and owns over 100,000 acres of splendid timber lands in the Adirondacks.”

Finch celebrated with Cleveland at the White House on inauguration day, 1893.

“The steady tramp, tramp of the office seeker sounded through the White House all day. There was practically no cessation in the flock of people who ascended the stairway to the President’s room,” *The Argus* of Albany reported on March 8, 1893. “J.W. Finch of Glens Falls, who helped along the Cleveland campaign fund by large contributions, also saw him.”

Finch was a co-founder of the paper manufacturer Finch, Pruyn & Co. He had long been a confidant of Cleveland’s from his days as New York governor and frequently defended Cleveland’s economic policies in the media.

“Business is getting better — right along. The country may have an occasional setback, but nothing can check its ultimate prosperity,” Finch said, speaking with reporters when he visited the White House, according to a *Washington Post* report republished April 23, 1895, in *The Morning Star* of Glens Falls. “The worst danger now confronting us is the menace to a sound system of finance indicated by the extremists on silver.”

During the 1884 presidential campaign, Finch was among those who met privately with Cleveland on July 24, *The Argus* reported on July 25. It’s likely the discussion centered on a strategy to manage a sudden crisis — on July 21, *The Buffalo Evening Telegram* reported that Cleveland, a bachelor, had fathered a child out of wedlock, leading to the famous GOP campaign slogan, “Ma, Ma, where’s my Pa? Gone to the White House, Ha, Ha, Ha.”

Cleveland acknowledged he financially supported the child but said he did not think he was the father.

Finch was a New York delegate to the 1888 Democratic National Convention in St. Louis, when Cleveland was nominated by acclamation for a second term. Cleveland, despite winning the popular vote (sound familiar?), would lose the election to Benjamin Harrison.

In 1887, Finch was believed to be the richest resident of Glens Falls, having personal wealth of \$1 million — the equivalent of \$33 million in 2024 dollars — *The Argus* reported on Jan. 17, 1887. By 1895, he was mostly managing his local business ventures from a distance.

Outside Glens Falls, Finch was better known for his political prominence as “a staunch Democrat” who served on the state Democratic Committee for many years.

“His influence in the concerns of his party was always important, but he was never a seeker of office or emoluments,” *The Post-Star* reported on Dec. 17, 1904, at the time of Finch’s death.

Finch was born March 28, 1827, at Kingsbury in Washington County, the son of a prosperous farmer. He left the farm at around age 21 to work at a general store in Sandy Hill, now Hudson Falls, and a few years later for lumber manufacturer Orson Richards.

In 1866, Finch, his brother D.J. Finch and Samuel Pruyn established Finch, Pruyn & Co.

Jeremiah Finch also was president of Glens Falls National Bank from 1875 until his death in 1904.

“Genial and generous in spirit, he won and held the warm regard of his associates, and we bid him adieu with unfeigned sorrow,” the bank board eulogized Finch in a resolution at the time of his death.