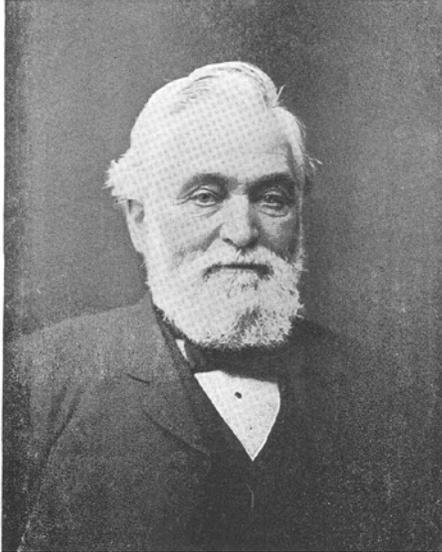


## **FREDERICK SMYTH, 1819-1899**

*Written by Matthew Normand, City Clerk*



Frederick Smyth is best known as a mayor of Manchester and a governor of New Hampshire but his influence on a burgeoning industrial city stretched beyond his time in these corner offices. Smyth became an immensely popular political figure in the city despite the fact that he was not native to Manchester. He pushed for increased school appropriations, improved conditions for the poor, library access for all residents, and a substantial enhancement to the city's infrastructure through greater allocations to street and sidewalk construction. Smyth would later go on to become an essential leader whom Abraham Lincoln sought counsel with during his visit to Manchester in 1860.

Born in Candia on March 9, 1819, Frederick Smyth came to Manchester in 1838 seeking employment as a clerk in a local store on Elm Street. In a few short years he was made partner. He later married and moved to a home on Central Street, west of Chestnut Street – the current location of Monument Square. By 1851, he had served as ward clerk of Ward 2 and the assistant engineer of the Manchester Fire Department.

In 1849, Frederick Smyth was appointed city clerk. Upon his reappointment to the post the following year, the *American and Messenger* newspaper reported the significance of this feat given that two-thirds of the council was politically opposed to Smyth, a compliment to his integrity and courtesy to those he encountered each day as clerk.

He was elected to the corner office in 1852, becoming the fifth mayor in the city's history. Smyth gave a rousing inaugural address in which he outlined his path to prosperity. By May, he had secured a partnership with the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company to plant trees along Elm Street and began work on securing the annexation of several thriving neighboring communities – Piscataquog and Amoskeag as well as sections of Bedford and Goffstown. During his second and third terms as mayor, with annexation complete, he negotiated an agreement with the Manchester Athenaeum (a private library) to surrender their 4,000 volumes and historical documents over to a public city library – open to all residents. According to Grace Holbrook Blood's book, *Manchester on the Merrimack*, Frederick Smyth was also instrumental in calling for the establishment of a house of reformation for juvenile offenders which was eventually created in 1858 on a portion of the estate formerly owned by General John Stark.

As Smyth transitioned out of city hall, he served as president and treasurer of the Merrimack River Bank located on the second and third floors of Smyth Block, the current site of the Brady Sullivan Plaza at 1000 Elm Street. Smyth was also the chairman of the local Republican City Club which held a momentous rally in Smyth Block on Thursday, March 1, 1860, featuring Abraham Lincoln.

This now famous Lincoln visit to New Hampshire was part of a three day, four speech tour of the Granite State. Lincoln had come to visit his son, Robert, at Phillips Academy in Exeter but also to speak publicly about the importance of opposing the extension of slavery. After two failed attempts at election to the United States Senate in the 1850s, there was no mention at the time of Lincoln running for president as William H. Seward of New York was believed to be the favorite for the Republican nomination in the coming months - a significant note given Frederick Smyth's next move.

As chairman of the Republican City Club, Smyth had the honors of introducing Lincoln to those in attendance at Smyth's Hall. As he stood before a packed house, he presented Abraham Lincoln as the next president of the United States. In Elwin Page's book, *Abraham Lincoln in New Hampshire*, it is noted that nobody was more stunned by Smyth's words than Lincoln himself. Grace Holbrook Blood further identifies Manchester as having the honor of being the first city to mention him publicly and with assurance as the next president.



**City Hotel at 1103 Elm Street** – Owned by Daniel T. Morris in 1860 and billed as a first class hotel with airy, pleasant, and handsomely furnished rooms, the City Hotel provided one such room to Abraham Lincoln, his son Robert, and Robert's friend from Phillip Academy in Exeter, George Latham. A copy of the register bearing the signature of the special visitors is preserved today at the Manchester City Library. Photo courtesy of the Manchester Historic Association.

In 1864, Smyth reluctantly agreed to serve for a fourth term as mayor of Manchester and was elected without a show of opposition. Election results in the City Clerk's archives show that Frederick Smyth won the election unanimously, with other candidates receiving less than five votes each. The following year, however, Smyth moved to another corner office.

Elected governor of the state in 1865 by the largest majority given to any governor in the previous twenty-four years (a majority of over 6,000 votes), Smyth went on to serve two successful terms as governor guiding the state through difficult financial times due to the Civil War.