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JAMES BUCHANAN  
(1791-1868)  
15th President of the United States  
(March 4, 1857-March 3, 1861)

Born April 23, 1791 in Franklin County, Pennsylvania, James Buchanan attended Dickinson College in Pennsylvania and then studied law. He became possibly the finest constitutional lawyer of his time, an exceptional diplomat and a devoted patriot. He has come to be known as the last of the "Southern Presidents" because of his defense of southern causes. He was also the only president never to be married. His amazing success as a lawyer allowed him to retire before he was forty, and devote the rest of his life to politics. By that time, he had already spent ten years in the U.S. House of Representatives and several years in the Pennsylvania State Legislature. In 1832, President Jackson sent him to Russia to conclude a difficult commercial treaty. When he returned successful, he was elected to the U.S. Senate.

For twenty years, Buchanan built a reputation as an expert on the judicial system and on foreign affairs. He served as President Polk's Secretary of State and as minister to Great Britain under President Pierce. Three times, his own party passed him by for nomination to run for President -- but Buchanan refused to give up. In 1844, Polk placed Buchanan in charge of negotiating the Oregon Territory with Great Britain, which was done successfully. He continued in politics until 1849, when he retired and purchased his "Wheatland" mansion in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. By 1856, he had lost the nomination for President to Polk in 1844, Taylor in 1848 and to Pierce in 1852. At last, in 1856, he was unanimously nominated by the Democrats on the 17th ballot and was elected to the Presidency.

Buchanan entered the White House with serious misgivings. He believed the Abolitionists would very soon force the country into civil strife and was not anxious to have it happen during his own administration. He had always supported the Constitution, and felt that State secession was not only illegal but really impossible. Still, he did nothing when South Carolina began the procession of seceding southern states. He had refused to reinforce Fort Sumpter for fear of inciting the southerners to revolt. Later, when the Fort was captured in the first skirmish of the War Between The States, it was far too late to do anything about it. Buchanan was more than willing to turn the office of President over to Abraham Lincoln. Buchanan retired to his estate at "Wheatland" where he lived until June 1, 1868.

THE MEDAL

Obverse: Buchanan appears on the medal as a man of wisdom and careful thought. He was generally of a stocky build, with a full face and rounded features, yet there is still a hint of indecisiveness in his profile.

Reverse: The design for the reverse of the medal shows a farmer leaning on a plow, talking with an Indian Chief. The American flag flies in the background while above it are three words chain-linked together: Labor, Virtue, Honor.

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Gift of Dan Bechtel  
1975



## JAMES BUCHANAN

**Fifteenth President of the United States**  
*March 4, 1857 to March 3, 1861*  
(No. 115)

**OBV.** James Buchanan. President of the United States. 1857. Bust of the President.

By Salathiel Ellis.

**REV.** A farmer, leaning upon a plow, and conversing with an Indian Chief, an American flag in the background, and above it three links: Labor, Virtue, Honor.

By J. Willson.

### JAMES BUCHANAN

- 1791—Born April 23, 1791, at Cove Gap in Franklin County, Pa., the son of James Buchanan and Elizabeth (Speer) Buchanan.
- 1807-09—Attended, and was graduated from Dickinson College, Pa.; later, studied law.
- 1812—Although a Federalist and with his party opposed to the War of 1812, he urged the enlistment of volunteers for the defense of Baltimore, and was one of the first to enroll his name.  
Admitted to the bar and commenced practice at Lancaster.
- 1814—Served in the House of Representatives of the Pennsylvania Legislature.
- 1820—Elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, serving until 1831.
- 1822—Buchanan's first speech in Congress was made in January 1822, supporting the Administration of President Monroe, in maintaining an adequate military establishment.
- 1828—Became Chairman of the Committee on Judiciary of the House of Representatives.
- 1831—In June he accepted President Jackson's appointment of U.S. Minister to Russia though he contemplated retirement from politics. While in Russia he negotiated a commercial treaty.
- 1834—Elected as a Democrat to the U.S. Senate. Remained in the Senate until 1845 and was known as one of

the prime supporters of Jackson and Van Buren.

1839—Declined the office of Attorney General tendered by Van Buren.

1844—After losing the Democratic presidential nomination to James K. Polk, he accepted the position of Secretary of State under Polk.

The situation in Texas was the major interest of the Polk administration. Mexico would not recognize the independence of Texas and hoped that the Oregon question would strengthen her position. President Polk wanted the Oregon question settled as swiftly as possible. Polk placed Buchanan in charge of negotiations and he claimed all of Oregon for the United States and refused to arbitrate; though he finally reached an agreement with Great Britain on a boundary along the continental line of the 49th parallel.

1846—In order to discourage suspected British designs on California, Buchanan advised President Polk to make a stern restatement of the Monroe Doctrine in his message to Congress.

1848—Made an offer of \$120 million to Spain for the purchase of Cuba. The offer was rejected.

1849—Buchanan retired from office and purchased "Wheatland," a country estate near Lancaster, Pa.

1853—After losing the presidential nomination in 1852 to Franklin Pierce, Buchanan accepted the post of Minister to Great Britain.

1856—Unanimously nominated on the 17th ballot as the Democratic candidate for President, and on November 4, 1856, was elected.

In selecting his Cabinet, he gave equal representation to slave and non-slave-holding States calling it "The Sacred Balance." He wanted his administration to be known for its vigorous foreign policy.

He concluded the arrangements between Great Britain, Nicaragua, and Honduras in order to check the activity of the British fleet in searching vessels suspected of participating in slave trade in American waters. He obtained reparation from Paraguay for the firing on the WATER WITCH, and he improved U.S. relations in the Far East by receiving ambassadors from Japan and Siam.