

General David L. Brainard, U.S. Army: Last survivor of the United States' Lady Franklin Bay Expedition (1881-84)

by Glenn M. Stein, FRGS

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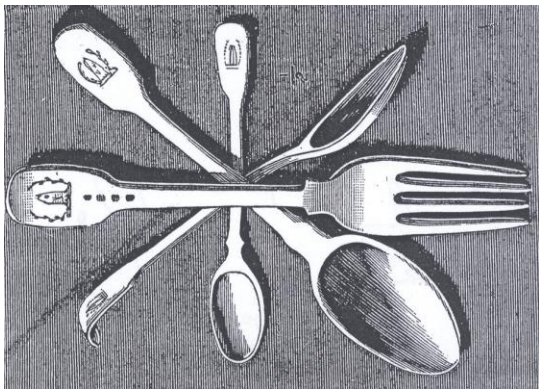
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The Early Years

He didn't know it at the time, but David Legg Brainard was to become one of those rare individuals in military history who rose from Private to General by pulling himself up by the bootstraps. The fifth son of Alanson and Maria (née Legg) Brainard, was born on his parents' farm in Norway, New York, on 21 December 1856. He attended public school in Norway and when David was ten years old, the family moved to the John Corp farm at Freetown, New York, where Alanson also operated a dairy. David attended the State Normal School in Cortland, and when not in class indulged in horseback riding around the farm – a pastime that was to serve him well in the very near future.

In September 1876, 19-year-old David left home to travel to Philadelphia and view America's first successful world's fair, the Centennial Exposition. During this 100th birthday of the nation, the country proudly displayed its agricultural and industrial ingenuity. In addition, relics from the ill-fated Franklin Expedition, obtained by the American Arctic explorer Charles Francis Hall, were in the U.S. Naval Observatory's Arctic exhibit, and one cannot help but wonder if young Brainard viewed these grim artifacts.

After taking in many marvels of the Machine Age, Brainard boarded a train for home. At New York City, he changed trains and reached into his pocket for money to buy a ticket, but there was none. Too proud to write his family for funds, Brainard took the free ferry to the U.S. Army Post at Governor's Island and joined the Regular Army. He was perhaps also inspired by memories of older brother Henry, who joined the 186th New York Infantry as a teenage soldier the Civil War.



Silver utensils from the Franklin Expedition obtained during Hall's 1864-69 expedition. (Nourse, 1879)



Private David L. Brainard, U.S. Cavalry, in September 1876.
(courtesy Jerome A. Greene)

While putting on his new uniform, the young man found a ten dollar bill hidden away in his civilian shirt pocket, but it was too late – he was now Private David L. Brainard. Brainard even chided himself years later, as he wrote privately during an Arctic expedition, “It is just five years ago today since I left home to make an ass of myself by joining the regulars.”

When Brainard joined the Army, it had been only three months since Custer's command was mauled at the Little Big Horn, and in no time, Brainard was sent to Company L, Second Cavalry (the designation did not change to “troop” until around 1881), Fort Ellis, Montana Territory. Serving against the Northern Cheyenne and Sioux Indians, and later the Nez Perce and Bannock Indians, the square-jawed Brainard was a keen soldier, who firmly believed orders clearly issued should be obeyed. The spring of 1877 found Companies F, G, H and L of the Second Cavalry reporting to Col. Miles at Fort Keogh. Along with six companies of infantry, and a company of mounted scouts, Miles’ command was numbered in excess of 21 officers and 450 men. They marched south along the Tongue River in early May and picked up the trail of the Sioux chief Lame Deer.

Lame Deer's village was discovered near the mouth of Muddy Creek, and Miles determined to attack the Indians at dawn on 7 May, while most of village's occupants were asleep. In the initial assault, an officer with 20 scouts and mounted infantrymen, plus Company H, Second Cavalry, charged through the left side of the camp and stampeded the pony herd about a half-mile beyond. The warriors tumbled from their tipis, randomly firing as they fled toward the hills around the camp. Companies F, G and L followed their fellow cavalrymen, then wheeled to the right, and engaged the Sioux as they took up positions in the hills.



The Trooper, by Frederic Remington, 1892. (Museum Syndicate)

Wishing to communicate with the fleeing Indians, Miles briefly parleyed with Chief Lame Deer and his nephew, Iron Star, and the shooting stopped. But the situation was very tense and through indiscretions on both sides, shooting erupted and Miles had a very near brush with death, as a bullet fired by Lame Deer narrowly missed the Colonel and killed his orderly. Pandemonium broke out, and Lame Deer and Iron Star ran about a hundred yards before the Chief was mown down by gunfire from Company L cavalrymen. Brainard witnessed the moment:

About this moment the troop to which I was attached dismounted, and we followed the Indians up the precipitous hills. The head-dress made a very conspicuous target, and

many shots were fired at the Indian wearing it. Finally he was seen to totter, and the other Indian...placed his hand about the other's waist and supported him up the hill; Lame Deer was seen to take a pistol from his belt and fire backwards in our direction... When the old man fell, Iron Star escaped over the hill through our left, and ran into the face of G troop under Wheeland [sic], and was shot by Wheeland, who used a pistol.

Miles wanted to clear the high ground of the Indians who were directing sweeping fire against the soldiers below, so he assembled his men into skirmish order and the dismounted cavalymen of F, G and L advanced up and over a steep, timbered ridge. Company G flanked the Indians pursued by the other companies and “slaughtered them right and left and did terrible execution in a few moments.”

By nine in the morning, the attack was over and the cavalymen chased the warriors and their families into wooded ravines beyond the camp, but found few people. Meanwhile, the camp revealed a large quantity of booty, some of which was a grim reminder of the recent past. At least 30 tons of dried buffalo meat, hundreds of robes, carbines, powder and ammunition – and “many trophies of the Custer battle and several scalps of white men and women.” Of the herd of 450 captured horses, some bore the Seventh Cavalry brand.

All of the casualties suffered at the Battle of Little Muddy were born by the Second Cavalry: four men killed and nine wounded. The Sioux suffered 14 killed and many wounded during the engagement. Among the troopers wounded was Private Brainard, who suffered wounds to his right hand and a gunshot wound to his right cheek, affecting his eye. Over half a century later, in 1933, he received the Purple Heart for his injuries. Of the five Medals of Honor awarded for Little Muddy, four went to the Second Cavalry.

By 1878, Brainard’s soldierly talents resulted in his promotion to Corporal, and then Sergeant. He needed those talents, and every ounce of mental and physical courage he could muster, when his military career took a dramatic turn that forever changed his life.

International Polar Year

By the late 19th century, nations (in particular Great Britain) had been engaged in Arctic exploration for hundreds of years. Two primary goals were sought: a North-West Passage and the North Pole. The 1800s witnessed more and more blank areas of the Arctic map filled in; by the middle of the century, a North-West Passage was discovered and “farthest north” records were set – but the North Pole still eluded explorers.

In 1875, an Austro-Hungarian naval officer and polar explorer named Karl Weyprecht proposed fixed Arctic observation stations. Together with Bavarian scientist Georg Von Neumayer, in 1879 they proposed an International Polar Year (IPY). Both men realized that nations needed to stop competing for geographical discoveries and instead should dispatch a series of coordinated expeditions dedicated to scientific research. The causes

behind the forces of nature could be understood through observations in such fields as meteorology, oceanography and geomagnetism, and would benefit everyone. Eventually, 11 nations took part in the IPY 1882-83; 12 principal research stations were established across the Arctic, along with at least 13 auxiliary stations, and two subantarctic stations. Some 700 men worked to establish and relieve these stations between 1881 and 1884.

Howgate Arctic Expeditions

Captain Henry W. Howgate, U.S. Army Signal Corps, read Weyprecht's thoughts on Arctic exploration in 1876 and was inspired by them. With promised Congressional support, Howgate's ultimate objective was to place a 50-man scientific colony 500 miles from the North Pole by 1878, at Lady Franklin Bay, Ellesmere Land (discovered to be an island several years later).

Howgate promised First Lieutenant G.C. Doane, Second Cavalry, command of the expedition, but he also had in mind his protégé, First Lieutenant A.W. Greely, Fifth Cavalry. Although a preliminary expedition was sent to the subarctic, plans for the main expedition were voted down by Congress. Howgate ardently tried to revive his plan and eventually purchased a steamer in Scotland, sailed it to Washington, D.C., in 1880 and gained government backing for his venture.

On 6 May, the Secretary of War wired the Army's Department of Dakota and ordered Lieutenant Doane to leave Montana with the eleven specially selected Second Cavalry men whom he selected for the expedition – among them was Sergeant David Brainard. A board of naval officers examined the vessel and determined it was unseaworthy, so the eleven enlisted men were sent back to Fort Ellis. In complimenting the iron constitutions of the men, Doane noted “the severities of a winter in the northwest where the thermometer goes down to 50° below zero Fahrenheit”.

Lady Franklin Bay Expedition

At length, the U.S. government did decide to establish a scientific station at Lady Franklin Bay in 1881, as part of the American contribution to the International Polar Year. The expedition adopted the main features of Howgate's plan and represented America's first participation in an international scientific effort. The 25-man Army party was commanded by First Lieutenant Greely (Doane had declined to participate).

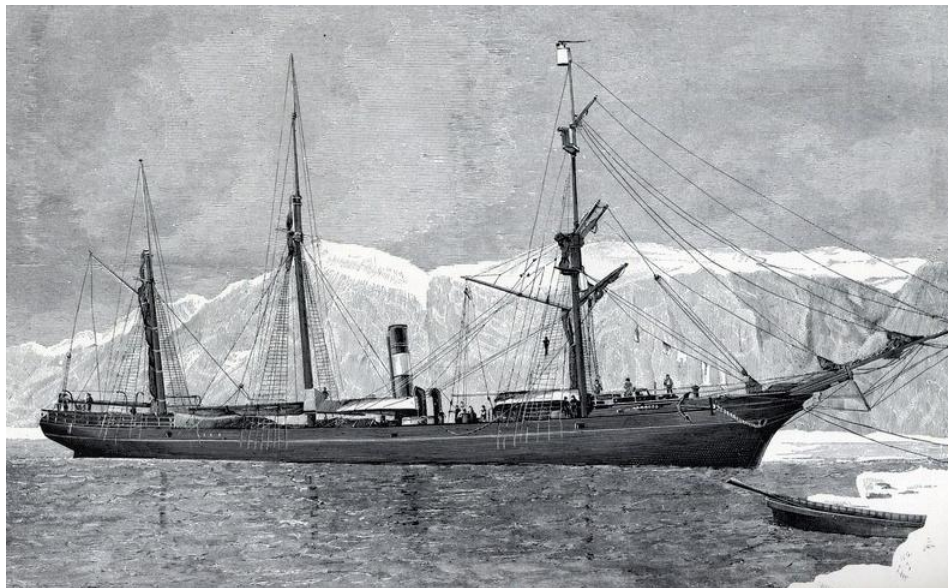
Greely was a Civil War veteran who had gained extensive experience in the West as the Army's top meteorologist and laying military telegraph wire. Greely was physically tough, experienced in command of men, had a scientific background, but he was also a strict disciplinarian and this feature of his personality played a key role in the ill-fated expedition.

Second Lieutenant F.F. Kislingbury and Second Lieutenant J.B. Lockwood were Greely's officers and the Doctor and Naturalist was Octave Pavy, a man with limited Arctic

experience. Pavy nevertheless thought highly of himself, as he was the only white participant with any polar experience. The party was composed of both infantry soldiers and cavalymen (six being from the Second Cavalry), though four of the men were civilian specialists who were given the ranks of sergeant. The military men had the experiences of campaigning during the bitter winters in the Far West – but even this paled in comparison the Arctic. Finally, two native Greenlanders acted as hunters and dog sledge drivers.

Brainard had hesitated to volunteer again for Arctic service. In less than a year, his term of enlistment would have ended and he yearned for the freedom of civilian life – he had even saved the misplaced ten dollar bill to celebrate his discharge. But the lure of the Arctic was too strong and after volunteering, he was chosen First Sergeant (Chief of Enlisted Men) and Commissary Sergeant.

The expedition left St. John's, Newfoundland on the hired vessel *Proteus*, on 7 July 1881. Brainard began his daily journal, which he maintained continuously for nearly three years. A good passage was made and Lady Franklin Bay reached in the first week of August. The base was constructed and named Fort Conger, after the senator who had taken a particular interest in the venture. The expedition's 30-foot steam launch, christened *Lady Greely*, was laid up for the winter, along with the whaleboat. Meteorological, magnetic and tidal observations were initiated and maintained continuously for two years.



S.S. *Proteus* at the entrance to Discovery Harbor, 12 August 1881. (Greely, 1888, Vol. 1)

It was not long before a falling out between the disciplinarian Greely and his second-in-command, Lieutenant Kislingbury, resulted in the latter asking to be relieved of his duty. Thus, Kislingbury's position in the party remained forever in limbo and an ominous shadow crept over the expedition. Brainard even chided himself that September as he

wrote privately, “It is just five years ago today since I left home to make an ass of myself by joining the regulars.” He reenlisted on 17 September 1881.

By the time the first winter began, however, there were reasons for satisfaction: four depots had been established northward along the coast of Grinnell Land, in preparation for spring sledge journeys. Sergeant Brainard was put in command of the whaleboat for one of these important missions and the depot he established contained 2,000 lbs. of provisions and supplies. Also, new areas of the interior had been mapped in the autumn.



Making ready for a sledge journey from Fort Conger. (Greely, 1894)

During the winter, a school was established and Lieutenant Lockwood edited and printed the fortnightly news sheet *The Arctic Moon*. The writings featured included subjects from the serious to the sentimental and humorous. In spite of these distractions, nobody escaped the psychological stress of the long dark months, even the stalwart Brainard remarked in his journal: “One scarcely wonders that [explorer Charles] Hall died. I think the gloom would drive me to suicide in a week.”

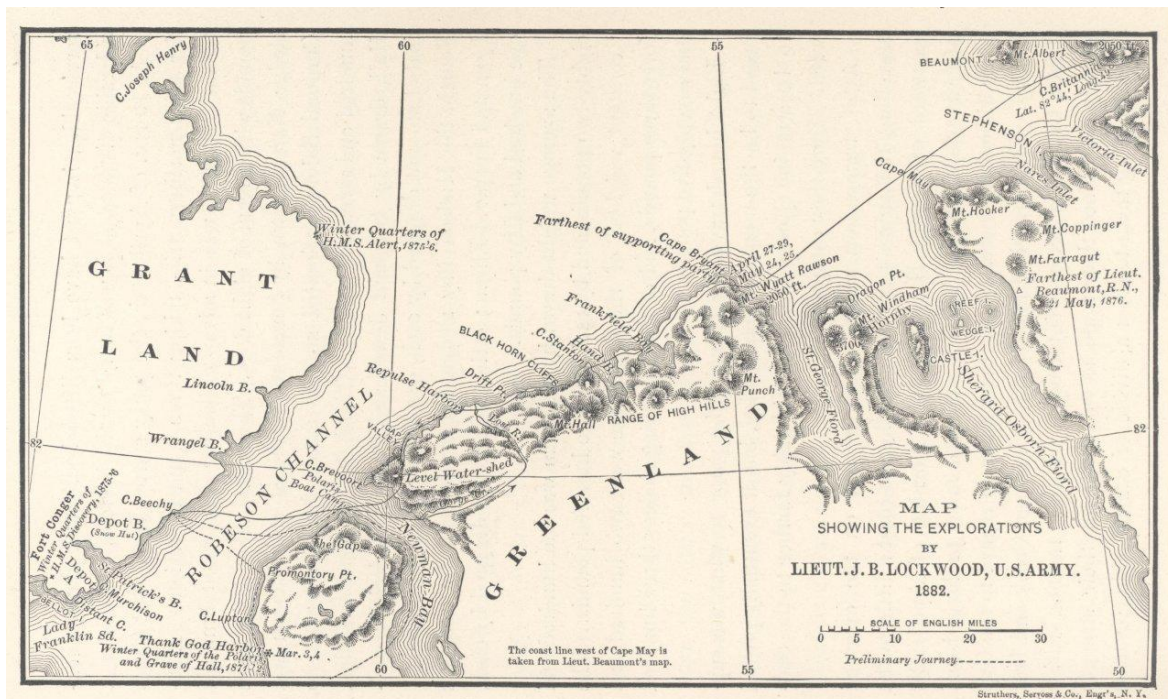
Spring Sledging 1882 and a “Farthest North” Record

A sledge party under Dr. Pavy was despatched to northern Ellesmere Island, to determine if land existed further north of the island, and encountered huge icebergs and enormous hummocks. The ice floes behind the party separated and the men retreated for fear of being marooned.

Greely set out from Fort Conger to explore the island's interior and discovered a large lake, which he named after General Hazen, Chief of the Signal Corps.

On 4 April 1882, the North Greenland Sledge Party departed with Lieut. Lockwood in charge, and Sgt. Brainard as second-in-command. It was organized into two parties, taking the sledges *Hayes*, *Kane*, *Beaumont*, *Hall* and the dog sledge *Antoinette* (named after Greely's daughter). After six days, the sun was with them constantly, day and night, and there was much suffering from snow blindness. Temperatures sometimes struck 50° below zero, and the men were exposed to chilling blasts that swept down from the north as they hugged the Greenland coastline.

On 29 April, the support party turned back, while Lockwood, Brainard and Greenlander Frederick Christiansen, with a single dog sledge and 25 days' rations, forged onward alone – and were about to make history. It was hard going over crusty ice and around huge hummocks. The total weight of their load was 783 pounds, including sledge – nearly 98 pounds per dog. At times, Brainard stumbled about like a blind man: “We have snow glasses, but seldom wear them. They make the ground appear uneven.”



Map of the Greenland Party's route. (Greely, 1894)

The trio soon surpassed the furthest point achieved by Lieut. Beaumont's Greenland sledge team during the 1875-76 British Arctic Expedition, whose maps greatly assisted the Americans. On 6 May, Brainard wrote about the unknown coast: “Travelling abominable. Our route leads us along the tidal crack which varies in width from one to one hundred yards...camp at 11:15 P.M., having travelled ten hours. Men and dogs both worn.”

Afterward, a severe snowstorm slowed progress to the point where the party had to camp on an island for 60 hours – a loss of time it could ill afford. On 13 May, the storm moderated and the advance was resumed through deep snow and pack ice, past capes and fjords. Finally, on that day, a new “farthest north” record was set at latitude 83° 24' N. and longitude 40° 46' W. – beating the record held by British Commander Markham in 1876 and surpassing 300 years of British Arctic record-breaking. Brainard recorded the moment:

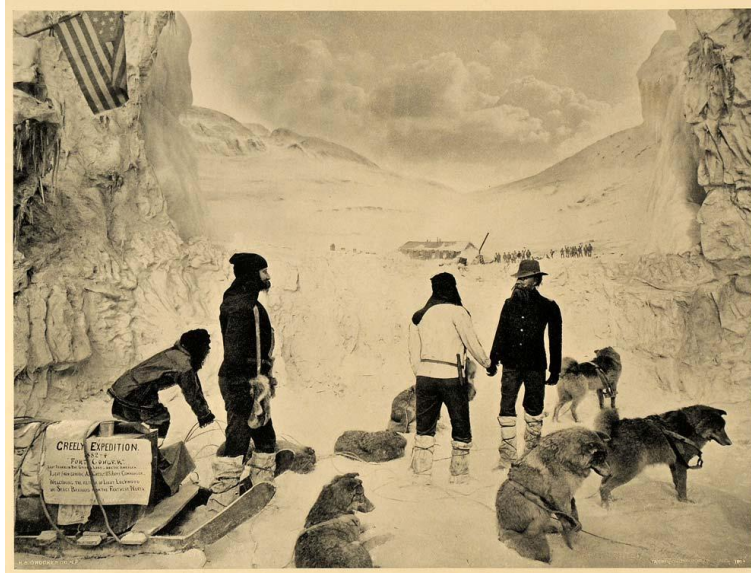
From observations taken along route, we believe we are in a higher latitude than ever before reached by man, and on land farther north than any was thought to exist. Once again we ran up the Stars and Stripes, this time with a feeling that warmed our spirits despite the northern breeze which swirled around us.

A flag-topped stone pyramid nine feet high was erected, containing a tin cylinder with expedition records and a self-recording spirit thermometer. Observations were taken and geological and botanical specimens collected, but Brainard marked the historic occasion in a uniquely American way. Anywhere he visited in the U.S., even in the remote areas of the Rocky Mountains, he found “Plantation Bitters” conspicuously advertised. Consequently, he carved “St 1860 X” (Started trade in 1860 with ten dollars.) on a slab in the face of a cliff. When he told Lieutenant Lockwood of what he had done, Lockwood laughingly said he was sure Brainard was a company employee and that he would expect to be paid in bitters for his work!



“Farthest North,” by Albert Operti. (Anchorage Art & History Museum)

Brainard and his companions left a “scene [that] was grand and impressive beyond description,” which included the later-named Lockwood Island and Brainard Island, and headed home. The three explorers reached Fort Conger on 1 June, having been absent 59 days and traversing nearly 1,100 miles, mostly in temperatures well below zero. Lieutenant Greely came out specially to greet the party.



“Return of the Greenland Party,” by I.W. Taber. (1894 California International Midwinter Exposition)

The Relief Ship and a Second Winter

Summer excursions were made to the westward, across Grinnell Land, Ellesmere Island's interior. The landscape came alive with newly discovered lakes, rivers, glaciers and mountains. In order to supplement the station's food supply, much hunting was also carried out.

Besides the excursions, there were routine duties and a good deal of time spent writing letters to send back home on the expected relief ship. Though equipped with ample food and clothing for a two-year stay at Lady Franklin Bay, a vessel bringing new personnel, additional supplies and mail was due to arrive at Fort Conger during the summer of 1882. The expedition had come through the first winter in good health and spirits and the future looked bright.

By September the relief ship *Neptune* was turned back by the ice in Smith Sound, 300 miles from Fort Conger. She deposited enough rations at Cape Sabine (Ellesmere Island) to feed Greely's party for ten days and an equal amount at Littleton Island (Greenland side). This caused no immediate hardship for the well stocked expedition, but the novelty of Arctic exploration had worn off for the men who were due to return home, arousing tension, dissatisfaction and insubordination.

Greely's relationships with Dr. Pavy and Lieutenant Kislingbury, never good, grew worse during the winter. No one had spent two winters so far north and the long months of darkness chafed on everyone, even Brainard, who were much affected by the idleness.

Spring Sledging 1883

Lieutenant Lockwood, Sergeant Brainard and Greenlander Frederick, with a team of the ten best dogs, set off to the southwest on 25 April, across Grinnell Land toward the Western Ocean. It was the last extended sledge journey for the expedition before the relief ship was expected in the summer.

A week later, while scouting, Brainard climbed some cliffs south of camp. "The view was worth the climb," he wrote, "I saw a magnificent panorama of imposing snow-clad mountains and sweeping hills intersected by valleys and ravines."

Dashing on, the intrepid explorers crossed the island for the first time from the east to the Western Ocean and saw marine fossils and petrified trees. Along the way, they discovered an 85-mile long glacier subsequently named Agassiz Glacier. They also discovered and named Greely Fjord and two headlands north and south of the fjord became Cape Brainard and Cape Lockwood.

The party returned to Fort Conger by 26 May. In the process of charting large areas of Grinnell Land, Lockwood, Brainard and Greenlander Frederick had completed all three "farthest" during the Lady Franklin Bay Expedition – north, east and west. They had journeyed on foot and by sledge one-eighth of the distance around the world above the 80th parallel. Greely radiated with praise and reserved a special honor for Brainard:

Sergeant Brainard's share of this work showed the same sterling qualities evinced by him the previous year, and in consequence he was recommended by me in 1882 for a commission in the Army.



Fort Conger on 20 May 1883. (Greely, 1894)

Mutinous Retreat

Through the summer months, hopeful eyes scanned the empty horizon south of Fort Conger for the relief ship. Greely would have liked to send home certain undesirables, like Sergeant Cross, the steam launch's engineer, but he was indispensable as a skilled mechanic. One time, Cross got drunk from stolen spirit lamp fuel and fell from the launch. He would have drowned if it were not for Brainard, who hauled him out of the freezing water.



The steam launch *Lady Greely* towing boats through a massive split in a floeberg. (Greely, 1894)

But what if the relief vessel failed to reach the outpost? Before leaving the United States, Greely worked out a detailed plan whereby the party would retreat south if the relief ship

did not arrive. A string of depots planted along the Ellesmere coast by the *Proteus* when she brought the party north in 1881 would keep it supplied with food and enable the boats to carry minimum loads. A relief ship would be waiting for Greely at the most northern point allowed by the pack ice, but if not, a relief party would camp at Littleton Island (Greenland side) with food and clothing, to keep contact between the two parties throughout the winter. Everyone was to be picked up in the spring. It was a sound plan, if, in Brainard's words, "nothing upset the scheme [Greely] had meticulously worked out for an independent retreat southwards."

On 9 August 1883 began what became a 500-mile retreat by boat, sledge and drifting. "I was the last to leave the station and nailed the door securely," wrote Brainard. Unknown to anyone, two weeks previous, the *Proteus* was crushed the by ice far to the south. Though some food and supplies were deposed ashore, the ship went down with most of her valuable cargo – rescue did not await the men of the Lady Franklin Bay Expedition.

Greely was in charge of the steam launch *Lady Greely*, which towed the other boats: Rice commanded the jollyboat *Valorous*, Connell the iceboat *Beaumont* (both left by the British expedition) and Brainard the whaleboat *Narwhal*. Each officer was allowed 16 pounds of personal baggage and each man only eight pounds. Scientific instruments and accompanying records were carefully packed and stowed.

On the 13th, the party's passage down Kennedy Channel was blocked by a huge grounded floeberg that ran a mile out from shore. It had split, leaving a cleft scarcely 12 feet wide, 50 feet high and more than 100 yards long. As the boats passed through the blue-green ice tunnel, the men could hardly help but be impressed with the natural corridor.

Greely was no sailor, he was feeling his way – and his men knew it. As the party plodded southward the ice and weather terrorized them all the way, keeping them away from the depots ashore. Greely wrote, "Our progress shows the decided advantage of detailing Brainard to select the route."

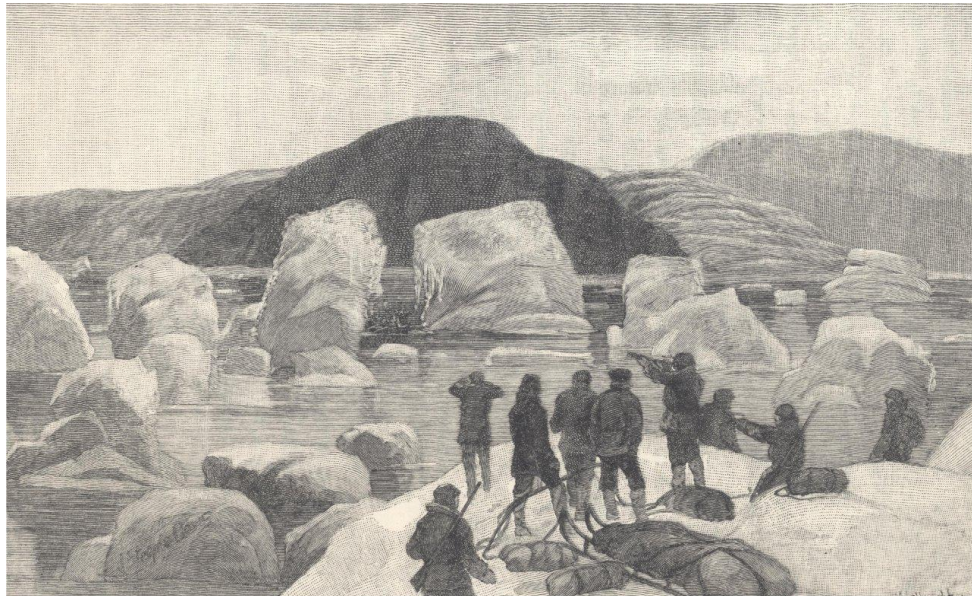
During the course of the retreat, Brainard became more and more concerned over Greely's distraught frame of mind. At one point, Greely proposed to abandon the steam launch, put the boats and supplies on the drifting ice, and float south with the current to Littleton Island. To Brainard the idea seemed sheer madness. Cross wrote, "The way things look, if C.O. has his way, we will wind up like Franklin." Brainard feared the same.

Dr. Pavy submitted a grave proposal to Brainard on behalf of some of the others. If Greely decided to go through with his planned "drift", the doctor would declare the commander of unsound mind, and Lieut. Kislingbury would take command and lead the party back to Fort Conger and retreat again next spring. The senior non-commissioned officer's support for the mutiny was crucial to secure the allegiance of the enlisted men. Gauging the characters of the men who planned the mutiny, Brainard refused to support the plan, which he could only see as a breakdown in discipline, thus putting the party in even greater danger.

By mid-September, the *Lady Greely* and *Valorous* were abandoned and there began a tortuously meandering 34-day drift on the ice. The men were all feeling hunger now and there was only a forty-day supply of rations left. As stoic as he was, Brainard was not optimistic:

The roar of the moving and grinding pack east of us in the axis of the channel is something so terrible that even the bravest cannot appear unconcerned. To add to this scene of desolation, dark, portentous clouds hang over the horizon to remind us that our floe is not connected with the land, but drifting helplessly in the Kane Sea.

It was not until 29 September that the party reached terra firma once more at a place across from Littleton Island. Greely named the spot Eskimo Point, after the discovery of three ancient igloos. Any rejoicing was short-lived. Continuing discipline problems and worsening food shortages caused Greely to take a still firmer hand with his men. As First Sergeant and Commissary Sergeant, an even heavier burden was placed on Brainard's shoulders.



Landing at Eskimo Point, 29 September 1883. (Greely, 1894)

Winter at Cape Sabine, 1883-84

A hunting party discovered a note left by the leader of the *Proteus* relief expedition in late July, indicating that some depots of food and supplies were left in the Cape Sabine area. In spite of the good news, Brainard was coldly realistic:

There are little more than 1,000 rations at Cape Sabine and these will not go far toward feeding twenty-five men. Little time remains to hunt and besides game has become noticeably scarce.

In early October, Greely predicted a dark future:

I, however, am fully aware of the very dangerous situation we are yet in, and foresee a winter of starvation, suffering and probably death for some... Our fuel is so scanty that we are in danger of perishing on that score alone. Am determined to make our food last until April 1, and shall so divide it, supplementing it from any game killed.

Entailing heavy sledge work, the party moved to Cape Sabine, as the thermometer steadily moved from zero degrees Fahrenheit to 13 below – and falling. Cape Sabine was several miles to the northeast, and there the men constructed a stone house for the winter. With a upturned boat for a roof, it was christened Camp Clay and measured only 25 X 18 feet, by four feet high.

Constant hunger was now their companion. Throughout the coming months, the men's spirits and energy dwindled. Brainard noted that, “No one ever thinks of wasting what energy he has in cleaning his person, or fussing with his ragged garments.” Worse, food was being stolen from the commissary storehouse. More than once, angry accusations flew from long-bearded faces, blackened by soot from the cooking fire. The Commissary Sergeant tried to set a spring-gun trap on the storehouse door, but had so much trouble setting the gun that he gave up the attempt.

The party engaged in storytelling to pass the time and Brainard told tales of fighting Indians, but nothing could really take their minds away from the hunger tearing at their stomachs. There were continual brave attempts to supplement the meager food supply by hunting, with varying success.

The first death in the Lady Franklin Bay Expedition occurred on 18 January 1884, when Cross died of starvation. The next morning Brainard and fellow Second Cavalryman Private Biederbick wrapped the corpse in empty coffee sacks with as much tenderness as they could manage and draped the American flag over the body. A six-man detail pulled the body on a sledge to what would become Cemetery Ridge, some 50 yards from camp.



Sergeant Cross' funeral at Cape Sabine, 19 January 1884. (Mowat, 1967)

Due to the frozen, rocky earth, the grave was only 15 inches deep. Brainard recorded the scene:

One cannot conceive of anything more unearthly, more weird, than this ghostly procession of emaciated and half-starved men moving slowly and silently away from their wretched ice-prison in the dim and uncertain light of an Arctic night, having in their midst a dead comrade who was about to be laid away in the frozen ground forever. It was a scene that one can never forget.

In spite of their privations, only one man died that winter, but scurvy was also among them.

Fatal Spring

With the coming of spring, Brainard lifted the mood of the entire party when he came into camp on 14 March with three ptarmigan he had shot – the first game since a scrawny fox was killed in February. Viewed as a good omen, the men started to formulate ideas to increase the food supply and Brainard acted on a proposal Greely had made some time before by rigging a cloth net to catch tiny crustaceans, about the size of wheat grain and referred to as “shrimps”. Brainard and Sergeant Rice made use of the rig in a tidal crack.

But there was a killer lurking about Camp Clay. One morning in late March, men started collapsing in the hut, and it was quickly realized that fumes from the alcohol lamp used to heat tea had poisoned their air supply. Someone snatched away the rags that had been stuffed the night before into the ventilation hole above the cooking place as everyone tumbled outside into the -24°F weather, taking deep gasps of the fresh morning air. It was a very close call.

Though the food supply moderately increased, by 2 April, Brainard wrote that “everybody is ravenously hungry, and all are growing daily weaker.” Then, three days later, Greenlander Frederick died after several days of extreme weakness. The next day, another man died, and then Lieut. Lockwood. Brainard noted a change that had come over the party:

Our own condition is so wretched, so palpably miserable, that death would be welcomed rather than feared...

On 14 April, Greely wrote in his journal that Brainard was to succeed him in command of the expedition should anything happen to him. On 22 April, Greely added, “I gave Sgt. Brainard instructions about my effects &c. if anything should happen to me. I want Brainard commissioned.” The stalwart Sergeant was making two and three trips a day to the tidal crack to secure “shrimps” and often returned to camp dizzy and staggering. He earned an officer's commission many times over.

Death stalked the expedition and seized Greenlander Jens Edward, who drowned in his kayak while recovering a seal. Also, there were more accusations and counter-claims of stealing food. Four men died in May, leaving just 14 remaining. Towards the end of the month, the hut was abandoned in favor of a tent for the coming summer.

At times, Brainard was much injured the actions of his comrades, one example being on 29 May, as recorded by Greely:

Brainard returned exhausted and half frozen from his shrimping trip, and was obliged to sleep outside the tent in the storm, as Dr. Pavy and Salor, who are in Brainard's bag, crowded him out, refusing to make room for him inside. Brainard took the matter very quietly, although in his weak condition he suffered greatly from cold and exposure.

Summer: Death and Salvation

Private Henry had been warned more than once about repeatedly stealing food and on the evening of 5 June, Greely quietly handed Brainard a page torn from his pocket notebook. It was an order to shoot Henry if he was again caught stealing food. Henry was caught dipping into the shrimp pot at next morning's breakfast, and when confronted, boldly

admitted his crime without the slightest repentance. Greely then wrote a new order to Sergeants Brainard, Long and Frederick – execute Private Henry. He wrote in part, “This order is *imperative and absolutely necessary* for any chance of life.” The three executioners drew lots as to who would fire the shots, as there was only one suitable rifle in camp, and swore never to reveal the man's name. Henry then paid the ultimate price for his crime. See “An Arctic Execution,” an exhaustively researched article by the author, <http://pubs.aina.ucalgary.ca/arctic/Arctic64-4-399.pdf>.



Private Henry's execution, as depicted by Charles Sarka. (Copley, 1911)

In spite of the dire circumstances, Brainard still took an interest in his surroundings. On 8 June, Greely penned that Brainard “found yesterday a few Eskimo relics. We told him it was a ruling passion strong in death, as he has always been gathering up articles of that kind.”



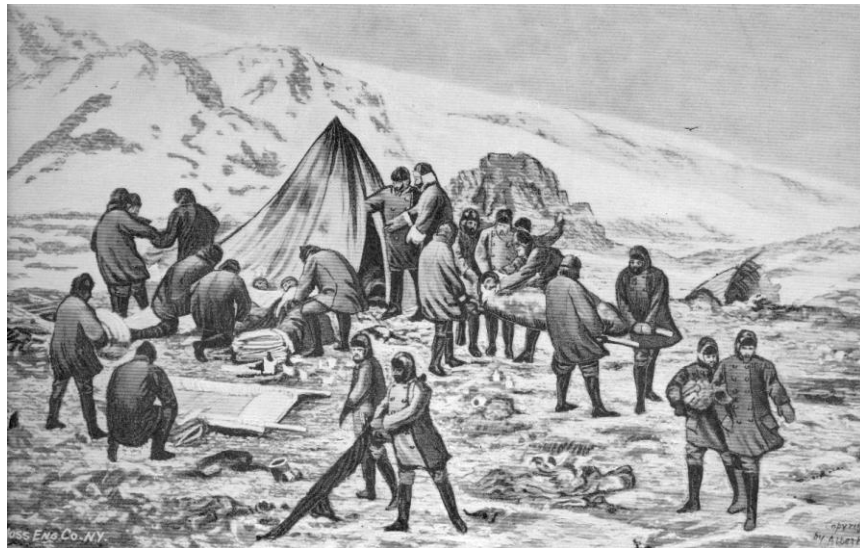
A bone knife acquired by Brainard during the expedition; its dark blue spotting is most likely from the same ink used by Fort Conger's printing press. (private collection)

By 22 June, just seven men remained from the Lady Franklin Bay Expedition, one of whom had long since lost both feet and had only shriveled and useless fingers due to frostbite. Greely thought he heard a ship's whistle and asked Brainard and Long to investigate. Having crawled up the ridge, the men saw nothing and Brainard returned to the tent to report to Greely. Long went up to the knoll to raise the fallen signal flag Brainard had planted there some weeks before, and as he gazed out into the water, he could just make out the form of a ship – they were saved!

Soon, Navy Lieutenant John C. Colwell and others were at the camp. Brainard immediately drew himself up to the “position of the soldier” and was about to salute, when Colwell gently took his hand. At the time of rescue, the men were within 48 of death, and it was largely due to Sergeant Brainard scrupulous handling of food supplies and his shrimp fishing that anyone was still alive. During the dreadful winter months, “no ounce of unauthorized food passed his lips,” wrote Greely about his valiant First Sergeant.

Bodies of the dead were exhumed by the rescuers from shallow graves on Cemetery Ridge and it was discovered that six had been cannibalized. This discovery and the failed relief missions caused a public sensation in the United States, but to their dying days, all of the survivors denied any knowledge of cannibalism.

In the end, only six remained of the 25-man Lady Franklin Bay Expedition, with the severely frostbitten man having died on one of the homeward bound rescue ships.



“The Rescue of the Greely Party,” official painting by Albert Operti. (1885)

Interestingly, Brainard first received recognition for his Arctic achievements, not from his own countrymen, but from the Royal Geographical Society in June 1886, which presented him with the Back Grant. The award included a gold testimonial watch and diploma. In his letter to the Society, Brainard generously acknowledged that Beaumont's “maps, sketches, and clear comprehensive descriptions” were key to

Lieutenant Lockwood's party attaining the highest northern latitude. Greely received the RGS Founder's Gold Medal.

That October, Sergeant Brainard was finally rewarded with a commission in his old unit, the Second Cavalry, "As recognition of the gallant and meritorious services rendered by him in the Arctic expedition of 1881-1884." At that time, and for many years thereafter, he was the only living officer of the Army, active or retired, holding a commission awarded for specific distinguished services.

By the early 1890s, Brainard was promoted to First Lieutenant, and during this period, several troops of the Second Cavalry were in the field searching for the Apache Kid, a former U.S. Army Indian Scout who had been a renegade for many years. Other detachments were in constant search of hostile Indians who were guilty of isolated plunderings. What eventually happened to the Kid is a mystery, but he likely made it to Mexico and died there.

In spite of becoming an expert marksman, Brainard's sight was affected by his eye wound from the Sioux War and snow blindness in the Arctic. This likely caused his transfer to a branch for which he was well-suited – commissary and subsistence – where he became a Captain in 1896.

Brainard rose steadily in rank and saw service during the Spanish-American War and Philippine Insurrection. Later, Brainard was the United States Military Attaché in Buenos Aires until the eve of America's entry into World War I in April 1917, and afterward in Lisbon, Portugal. He found time to get married for a second time in June, to Sara (née Hall) Guthrie, who already had a daughter named Elinor. Brainard was previously married to Anna Chase, at Walla Walla, Washington Territory, on 7 February 1888; the marriage lasted until at least January 1892, but the date of his (presumed) divorce is unknown.



Brainard's orders and medals. (photograph by Spencer J. Fisher; private collection)

He eventually retired as a Brigadier General in 1919. After his military retirement, Brainard became the Washington representative for a New York business firm, the Association of Army and Navy Stores, of which he was Vice President and a Director.

Belated Recognition and Remembrance of Arctic Service

By the 1920s, Greely had long since retired as a Major General, but he and Brainard had stayed in close contact since their Arctic days.

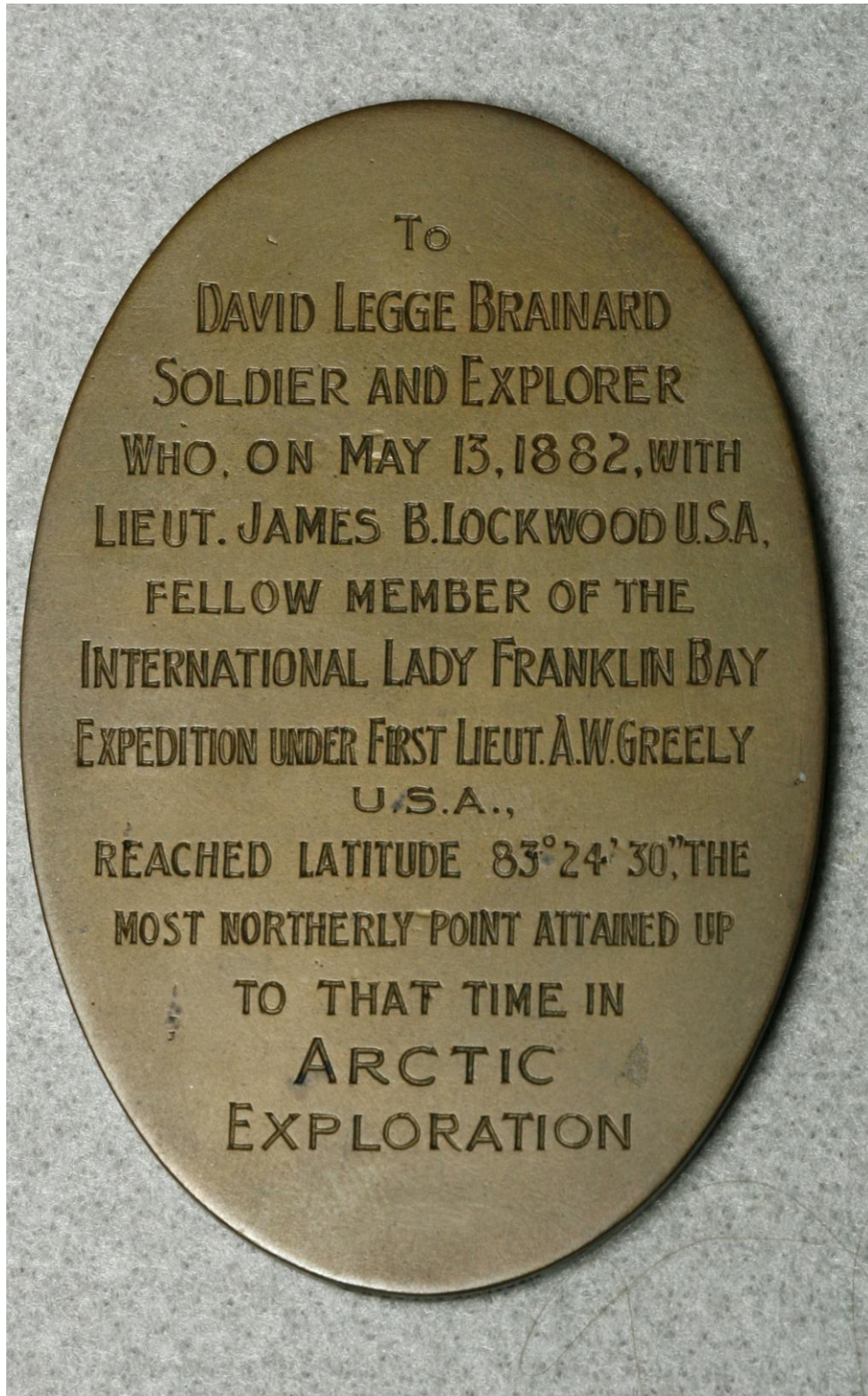
In April 1922, Brainard served as one of three Explorer Club's representatives invited to the unveiling of the Peary Memorial in Arlington National Cemetery; by this date, only Greely and Brainard remained of the six Lady Franklin Bay survivors. A few years later, Greely (on the Board of the National Geographical Society) wrote to Brainard, a Society member:

I have sent a letter to Shea stating that I am in accord with him at Pearys [sic] farthest North. At a proper time I hope you will express your opinion. I do not question Peary's truthfulness, but I do his accuracy. You are the best informed man alive who can pass from personal experience of the wonderful marches that P thought he made. It is an impossibility in my judgement.

After four decades, the American Geographical Society recognized Brainard for his "conspicuous work in the field of Arctic exploration" and awarded him the Charles P. Daly Medal in 1925. Greely wrote to the Society's secretary about Brainard with great pride: "As an American soldier his extraordinary services and unswerving fidelity during the fateful winter at Cape Sabine preserved lives, maintained solidarity, and eventually led to the preservation of the records of the first scientific cooperation of this country." Unfortunately, the whereabouts of this gold medal are unknown.

In June 1925, another moving unveiling also took place at Cape Sabine, honoring the dead of the Lady Franklin Bay Expedition, when the National Geographic Society's Memorial Tablet was affixed to a 100-ton boulder.

At the close of the decade, The Explorers Club presented its highest honor, the Explorers Medal, to the only survivor of the "farthest north" sledge party at the Annual Dinner on 12 January 1929. The award is the organization's highest honor bestowed and is awarded for extraordinary contributions directly to the field of exploration, scientific research or to the welfare of humanity. Perhaps influenced by the recent recognition, in the same year, Brainard published *The Outpost of the Lost: An Arctic Adventure*, a transcription of the last 11 months of his journal, which had lain for 45 years in an old trunk.



The reverse of Brainard's Explorers Medal. (photograph by Spencer J. Fisher; private collection)



Brainard receiving the first honorary membership of the American Polar Society at the Army & Navy Club, Washington, DC, on his 80th birthday in 1936; Marie Peary and Russell J. Walrath of *The New York Times* look on. (Dartmouth College Library)

The Last Survivor

Brainard's final polar accolade came in 1936, the year after Greely's death, when the American Polar Society elected Brainard its first Honorary Member on his 80th birthday. A few days before Christmas, Marie Peary (the explorer's daughter) was on hand to present a specially illustrated scroll, signed by Paul A. Siple (Society president and veteran of two Antarctic expeditions under Byrd). And the media sought out Brainard too; in the 1930s, and into the 1940s, he retold the story of Arctic adventure for newspaper readers and radio audiences alike.

The last survivor of the Lady Franklin Bay Expedition published a transcription of his journal for the entire expedition in 1940, under the title *Six Came Back: The Arctic Adventure of David L. Brainard*. One *New York Times*' book reviewer wrote, "It is easy to understand why this diary was withheld from publication until both Brainard and Greely were dead." The General wrote to the newspaper that "he is very much alive and expects to be for some time to come and asks that we take immediate steps to restore him to a living status through the same medium that deprived him of life." The *Times* was very glad to comply with such a request.

In October of that same year, a Mrs. Lillian Gary Taylor wrote to Brainard, asking him if he remembered the afternoon, many years ago, when she was a 16-year-old girl and christened the expedition's launch. In his jovial reply Brainard wrote, "I recall every

incident of the christening of the launch, *Lady Greely*, and I specially remember the charming young girl whom Lockwood had asked to do the christening. I have never forgotten the champagne, as it was the last that I drank for over three years.”



Brig. Gen. David L. Brainard, aged 87 in April 1944.
(photograph by Captain Stephen Waterman)

David L. Brainard remained active in business up until his death of a heart attack in Washington's Walter Reed General Hospital, on 22 March 1946; Sara Hall Brainard died in 1953, and both were laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery. Elinor passed away in New York City in 1982.

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