

Sayles Jenks Bowen

(7 Oct 1813 – 16 Dec 1896)

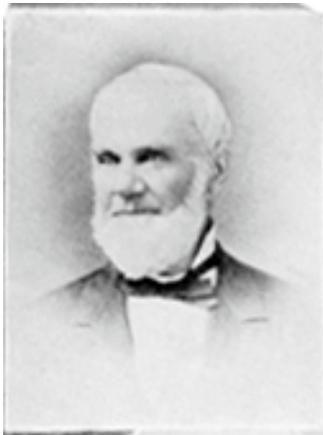
Bowen. On Wednesday, December 16, 1896, Sayles J. Bowen in his 84th year. Funeral service at his residence 3055 Q street northwest, Friday, December 18 at 2 p.m.

The Evening Star, December 17, 1896

Sayles J. Bowen Dead

Once Mayor of Washington--The Funeral Tomorrow

Sayles J. Bowen died yesterday afternoon at his residence, 3055 Q street after a long illness. He was conscious up to the last, although he had lost the power of speech. His wife and Miss Bently, a step-daughter, were at the bedside of the dying man. Funeral services will be held at the residence tomorrow afternoon at 2 o'clock. Rev. Byron Sunderland will officiate, and the interment will be at Congressional cemetery.



Mr. Bowen was born in Scipio, Cayuga county, N.Y., October 7, 1813. He was educated in the common schools and taught school for several years, working on his father's farm in the summer. In 1838 he engaged in the mercantile pursuits and seven years later he removed his residence to this city, having secured a clerkship in the Treasury Department. In 1848 he resigned and engaged in the claims business. In 1861 he was appointed a police commissioner of the District, and after holding this place for a few months he resigned and became disbursing clerk of the Senate. In 1862 he was made collector of internal revenue for the District and in the following year he was appointed postmaster of this city, a position he held for five years. In 1868, he was elected mayor of the city, and upon the expiration of his term was a candidate for re-election, but was defeated by what was known at the good citizens' movement, which resulted in the choice of Mr. Matthew G. Emery. He had a great deal of influence with the colored people of the District, who gave him their support in the local political contests.

The following have been selected as pallbearers, A.A. Birney, A.M. Gangewer, Chief Engineer E.D. Roble, U.S.N.; Z. Moses, Appleton P. Clark and James E. Bell.

****Madison Davis, "A History of the City Post Office,"** Columbia Historical Society, Vol. 6 (May 12, 1902), pp. 143 - ???

Upon the resignation of Lewis Clephane as postmaster, Sayles J. Bowen, who had been a resident of Washington for about eighteen years, succeeded him, the date of the appointment being March 16, 1863. He was born in the township of Scipio, Cayuga County, New York, October 7, 1813, and died in Washington City, December 16, 1896, in his eighty-fourth year. His parents were from Massachusetts, and were among the first settlers in Cayuga County. He assisted his father in the labors of the farm, received a good education in Aurora Academy, and taught school from the age of seventeen during the winter months. From 1838 until 1842 he was engaged in mercantile pursuits, after which he removed south, and in 1845, during the administration of James K. Polk, he was appointed to a clerkship in the Treasury Department. From this place he was removed in 1848 when he went into business of

prosecuting claims against the government, in which he was unusually successful. From 1856 to 1860 he was in politics, supporting the Republican party, and on the election of Abraham Lincoln was taken into his confidence. In 1861 he was appointed commissioner of police for the District of Columbia – a place then of great responsibility – and in the same year was made disbursing officer of the Senate. In 1862 he became collector of internal revenue for the district, and he held this post until March 16, 1863, when, as above stated, he received the appointment of postmaster. During the war all the mails for the Army of the Potomac originated at or were distributed through the Washington office, increasing enormously its duties and responsibilities; yet during Mr. Bowen's administration everything was done by him efficiently and faithfully, and to the satisfaction of the government and the public. He remained postmaster until July, 1868, when he resigned, to become the major of Washington, to which office he had been elected by popular vote.

In 1870, running again for the office of mayor, he was defeated, after which he ceased to hold any public place of prominence. In his extreme old age, he was somewhat straitened in his means, so much so that he was compelled to seek an humble situation in the department where he had first become publicly known. He was a great friend of the colored people, advocating the establishment of schools for their education, and spending \$20,000 of his own money for their support. He was also the friend of the poor and unfortunate of all races, and aided them in every way possible. Mr. Bowen was a man of temperate and excellent habits, true in his friendships, and faithful to duty. In the several positions held by him he disbursed many millions of government money, yet not a dollar was misappropriated, or failed of being legally and justly accounted for. In religion he was a Unitarian. He was married July 2, 1835, to Miss Mary Barker, daughter of John A. Barker, of Venice, Cayuga County, N.Y., a lady of very estimable character, who died June 2, 1882. Two years afterward – May 27, 1884 – he was married to Mrs. Bessie Bentley, of Morristown, New Jersey. He left no children by either wife. He was rather tall and well built, of a mild and benevolent aspect, was slow in all his motions, guarded and deliberate in speech, and very strong and pertinacious in his convictions. During part of his public career he was quite unpopular, but, taken in its entirety, his life was that of an upright, conscientious man, who gained and deserved the favorable regard of his countrymen.

During the entire term of Mr. Bowen as postmaster the office remained in the Post Office Department building on the F Street side. The revenue was not nearly so great as during Mr. Clephane's incumbency, the receipts for 1868, the last year of his term, being slightly over \$111,000.

Three very great changes in the postal system, bringing about the most advantageous results to the public, occurred during his term. The first was the abandonment of the old penny-post system, which had existed from colonial times, and the substitution of the free-delivery system, by act of Congress of March 3, 1863, under which uniformed letter-carriers, getting a regular salary from the government, are required to make delivery of mail matter, and to collect from established boxes throughout the city, without direct charge to the patrons of the post-office. The second change was the introduction of the money-order system, in November, 1864, under the act of Congress of May 17 of that year – a system whose business has grown throughout the country from about four million dollars of issued orders in 1865 to nearly three hundred and thirty-seven million in the present year, and which extends to nearly all the countries of the world. The third change was the introduction of what is called the return-request system, under which the sender of a letter, by a designated form of request made upon it, may have it returned to him free of charge in any prescribed time, in case of its non-delivery. These several changes, it need not be told, added very largely to the work of the office.