

## Griffith Coombe

(1768 – 14 Sep 1845)

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*The National Intelligencer, Tuesday, September 16, 1845*

**Died** --On Sunday morning last, after a protracted illness, Mr. Griffith Coombe, in the 78th year of his age. Mr. Coombe was a native of Delaware, but was one of the first and most active and enterprising founders of this city. He was long a member of the Church of Christ on Earth and died in the hope of a blessed immortality. The friends of the family are respectfully invited to attend the funeral of the deceased, from his late residence, near the Eastern Branch, at 10 o'clock this morning.

*The Evening Star, July 25, 1926*

### **The Rambler**

#### **Griffith Coombe and His Associates Were D.C. Leaders in Early Days**

The shades of several actors are at my desk and I mean to call them into these stories, but I ask them to wait a week or two. There comes to me the memory of a man of early Washington. His name is in the records of the city and his descendants and collateral kindred are numerous. This man was Griffith Coombe.

Madison Davis [R53/184], an old friend of ours, read a paper before the Columbia Historical Society, November 12, 1900, on the "The Navy Yard Section During the Life of the Rev. William Ryland." You remember Madison Davis? He filled positions in the Post Office Department, and some of you knew him when he was chief clerk to the Third Assistant Postmaster General, but most of you knew him during the years he was Assistant City Postmaster. Some of you have been to the old Davis home, No. 316 A street southeast. Well, in the paper on "The Navy Yard Section During the Life of the Rev. William Ryland" is this:

"Griffith Coombe was one of the best-known men in the early days of Washington's history. He was intimately connected, socially and otherwise with Thomas Law, Frederick May and other prominent and wealthy men of Capitol Hill and other parts of the city, and was a very successful man of business. His wife was Miss Mary Pleasonton, the aunt of Gen. Alfred Pleasonton [R42/245] of subsequent military fame.

Mr. Coombe's residence, which is yet standing (1900) -- its location being the corner of Georgia avenue and Third street southeast, was one of the first houses in Washington. It was built before the seat of Government was moved from Philadelphia, and was for many years the abode of wealth, elegance and culture. Gen. Washington is said to have dined and slept in this house. Certainly Jefferson and Madison were not strangers to its generous hospitality.

It is perhaps worthy of especial mention, from a historical point of view that when Gen. Winder and his little army in 1814 retreated before the British from the Old Fields in Maryland he came into the city over what was then called the Lower Bridge, and encamped on the plain known as the Navy Yard Common. He chose, however, for his headquarters the house of Griffith Coombe; and it was there that he received, up to the hour he left with his troops for Bladensburg, the President, the Secretary of State, Mr. Monroe; the Secretary of War, Gen. Armstrong, Commodore Tingey, Commodore Barney and many other distinguished persons. I regret to see that this old house is being allowed to go to ruin. Mr. Coombe lived to extreme old age, dying, I think, in 1845 or 1846. He was a faithful attendant at Christ Episcopal Church."

The body of Griffith Coombe was put in the Coombe family vault, Congressional Cemetery, September 16, 1845. By kindness of my friend at the cemetery lodge, Lewis B. Taylor [R89/386] the

superintendent, and Miss Gertrude Shelton, I can give you the names of those whose relics were laid in the Coombe vault.....

Griffith Coombe, was a son of Benjamin and Elizabeth Coombe of Delaware and he married Miss Mary Pleasanton, daughter of Jonathan and Ruhenna Pleasanton of that State, March 28, 1792. The children of Griffith and Elizabeth Coombe were Julianna, born in Philadelphia, November 14, 1793; Mary, born in Philadelphia, August 2, 1799; Ruhannah born at Washington, July 15, 1802; Elizabeth, born in Washington, January 16, 1805; James Griffith Coombe, born in Washington (I have not found the date).

Julianna Coombe married James D. Barry of Washington 1811. He died in 1856 and his widow, Julianna, lived to be 77 years old. Their descendants are numerous. Mary Coombe married Rev. David Butler, and one of their daughters married Edward Barry and another daughter married Dayton Ward. Mrs. Ward is living in Washington. Mary Barry lived to be 83.

Ruhannah Coombe married Rev. Thomas Hewett. Elizabeth Coombe married Bishop George Griswold. James Griffith Coombe married Emily L. McWilliams of southern Maryland in 1840.

The children of James Griffith Coombe and Emily were George G., Mary T., Alice, Pleasanton, Thomas Rodney, Eliza Barry and Clement G. George G. Coombe married Constine Middleton of Prince George's County, and their children were Harry, Ralph, Isabelle and William A. Coombe. Harry married a Miss Powers, Belle married, first a Mr. Harris, and has two sons, James and Ralph Harris. She married, second, Clayborne Hunter. Mary T. Coombe married William Page of Virginia and has as children Mary Emily, Anne Ramsey, Elizabeth Calhoun and Charles Craig Page. Mary Emily Page married William Letler of California and they have five children, William Bidemond, Craig, Mary, Catherine and Mildred Page Ketler. Mr. Ketler died in San Francisco in 1902. William Bidemond Ketler was killed in the World War. Mildred died in 1920. The others live in San Francisco.

Ann Ramsey Page married Gordon G. Ray of Montgomery County, Md., and they live in Mount Rainier, Md. Elizabeth Calhoun Page married Joseph F. Sheirburn of Charles County, and they have five children, William Harrison, Marjorie Elizabeht, Mary Paige, Elouise and Joseph L. Edmond Sheirburn.

A son and daughter of James Griffith Coombe and Emily L. McWilliams Coombe are living in Washington. They have a number of relics associated with the family and early Washington. I am told that they have four candlesticks which were on the altar of the first Catholic Church in Washington, Barry's Chapel. Griffith Coombe, I am told built that chapel for the Barry family. Miss Elizabeth Barry Coombe has two of the candlesticks and the others are with Mrs. Gordon G. Barry.

### **The Navy Yard Section During the Life of the Rev. William Ryland**

*Columbia Historical Society, Volume 4*

Mr. Coombe was one of the best-known men in the early days of Washington's history. He was intimately connected, socially and otherwise, with Thomas Law, Frederick May, and other prominent and wealthy men of Capitol Hill and other parts of the city, and was a very successful man of business. His wife was Miss Mary Pleasanton, the aunt of General Alfred Pleasanton of subsequent military fame. Mr. Coombe's residence, which is yet standing--its location being the corner of Georgia Avenue and Third Street southeast--was one of the first houses in Washington. It was built before the seat of government was moved from Philadelphia, and was for many years the above of wealth, elegance, and culture. General Washington is said to have dined and slept in this house. Certainly Jefferson and Madison were not strangers to its generous hospitality. It is perhaps worthy of especial mention from a historical point of view. When General Winder and his little army in 1814 retreated before the British from the Old Fields in Maryland, he came into the city over what was then called the Lower Bridge, and encamped on the plain generally known as the Navy Yard Common. He chose, however, for his headquarters the house of Griffith Coombe; and it was there that he received, up to the hour he left

with his troops for Bladensburg, the President, the Secretary of State, Mr. Monroe, the Secretary of War, General Armstrong, Commodore Tingey, Commodore Barney, and many other distinguished persons.

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**Griffith Coombe of City of Washington** (dtd. Feb. 8, 1845, probated Oct. 2, 1845, Will Book 5, O.S. #2578)

To wife, Mary Coombe, all property; at her death to be divided among my children and grandchildren; to son James G. Coombe,  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the whole,  $\frac{1}{4}$  in trust for my daughter, Juleana Barry, wife of James D. Barry, her child, Julianna H. Butler,  $\frac{1}{4}$ .

Exrs.: Mary Coombe, wife; James G. Coombe, son

Wits.: W. Gunton; James Adams; Hugh B. Sweeny      R Coombe S Vault