

William Sharples Derrick

(31 Jul 1802 – 15 May 1852)

The National Intelligencer, May 17, 1852

Obituary

On Saturday morning last, William S. Derrick, Chief Clerk in the Department of State.

Mr. Derrick was born in Westchester, Pennsylvania, on or about the 31st of July, 1802. He was appointed a clerk in the Department of State in 1827. He was well acquainted with the French and Spanish languages and with English literature. Throughout the term of his service in the Department he strove to earn promotion, and obtained it, not by courting the acquaintance of those having or likely to have political importance, but by the conscientious and accurate discharge of the duties assigned to him, without any taint of personal servility to his superiors in office, and by employing his leisure in those pursuits which were adapted to inform, expand, and elevate his mind, and to improve his great natural capacity for business. By his death the public has lost a faithful and laborious servant, his immediate family an affectionate husband, father, and friend, his associates in the Department a valuable exemplar, and his friends one whose worth they will always hold in vivid remembrance.

The friends of the family are respectfully invited to attend his funeral this (Monday) afternoon, at 4 o'clock, from the Church of the Epiphany, (Rev. Mr. French's) on G street, between 13th and 14th.

Family History

by Clarence Derrick

William Sharples Derrick, son of Philip Derrick (1772-1819) and Sarah Sharples (1774-1832) was born in West Chester, Pa., on or about July 31, 1802. His father, Philip Derrick, was the first Burgess of West Chester and co-owner of Derrick & Sharples; Printers. William S. Derrick "was well acquainted with the French and Spanish languages and with English literature". He married Anne Patterson Lyons (1807-1892) on August 9, 1827. He died of tuberculosis in Washington, D.C. on May 15, 1852. After services conducted by the Reverend Mr. French at the Church of the Epiphany on G Street between 13th and 14th, he was buried in the Congressional Cemetery in Washington D.C.

William S. Derrick was employed by the U.S. Department of State from 1827 until his death in 1852 and at "sundry times during that period he performed the duties of Acting Secretary of State an aggregate of 263 days by virtue of presidential appointments." At the time of his death he was Chief Clerk in the Department of State. After his death his widow, Anne Patterson (Lyons) Derrick, petitioned Congress for pay reimbursement, arguing that her husband should have been paid at a higher rate for the 263 days he was Acting Secretary of State. The issue dragged on for about 30 years when the petition was finally denied, after having been approved by certain Congressional acts.

During his career William Sharples Derrick served under eight presidents: John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson, Martin VanBuren, William Henry Harrison, John Tyler, James Polk, Zachary Taylor, and Millard Fillmore. He was private secretary to Henry Clay when Clay was Secretary of State and named his eldest son, Henry Clay Derrick. He also knew James Buchanan when Buchanan was Secretary of State. When Buchanan was President, he appointed William S. Derrick's second son, Clarence Derrick (1837-1907) to West Point.