

Thomas Jefferson Fletcher

(- 26 Jul 1844)

The National Intelligencer, Saturday, July 27, 1844

Melancholy Occurrence

(From Our City Reporter)

Two Deaths By Drowning

We are sorry to record the death of two of our citizens, Mr. Conway Lipscomb and Mr. Thomas Jefferson Fletcher, who lost their lives last Thursday evening about sunset by drowning in the Potomac, not far from the Long Bridge. As we have taken some pains to obtain a correct statement of the circumstances which led to the death of these unfortunate men, and as we had an opportunity of hearing the evidence submitted on the Coroner's Inquest, we believe the following particulars to be true:

It appears that the deceased, with two other citizens, named C. Kemble and P. Bowen, left this city on Thursday morning, between nine and ten o'clock, to enjoy a day's fishing in the Potomac at Arlington. They remained there for several hours, and in the afternoon, being driven to take shelter at the Island Hotel from the rain, they afterwards determined, when the shower abated to divert themselves by swimming in the Potomac. It seems that all of them swam a considerable distance into the river, until they reached the wake of the steamboat Phoenix, which passed down the river while they were bathing. Before they left the shore, it is said that three of the party, Messrs. Lipscomb, Fletcher, and Bowen, made up a match to swim to the channel and back. While engaged in this imprudent amusement, to say the least of it, poor Lipscomb was heart to cry out for help, and it is supposed that he was seized with the cramp. Mr. Fletcher then swam to the assistance of his drowning companion, and succeeded in reaching him, when, unfortunately, he was so clutched by Mr. Lipscomb that they both sank together. Mr. Fletcher was heard by Mr. Kemble to exclaim that Lipscomb had clutched him. It appears, however, that Kemble and Bowen, being both very much exhausted, and afraid that they would lose their lives, did not go towards Lipscomb and Fletcher, and the latter sank together to the bottom of the river where there was about eight or ten feet water.

As there was no boat at hand, it took three quarters of an hour before one could be procured from a schooner near the Long Bridge. The bodies were then recovered, about thirty feet distant from each other, in about four feet depth of water; and it is presumed they had shifted their position by the falling of the tide. On the recovery of the poor sufferers from the water they were immediately taken to the Island Hotel, where, with the aid and under the direction of Dr. Buck, every effort was made to resuscitate the bodies, but all without effect -- Mr. McGrath humanely assisting the Doctor with all the help his house could afford.

A Coroner's Inquest was held yesterday before Thomas Woodward, Esq. and a jury, in view of the dead bodies, when numerous witnesses were examined. The verdicts were: That Conway Lipscomb was accidentally drowned while swimming in the Potomac on the 25th July, and that Thomas J. Fletcher was drowned while trying to rescue Conway Lipscomb from a watery grave.

It is a sad reflection that both the poor sufferers have left wives and children to mourn their loss. It was distinctly stated in evidence before the coroner's jury that the deceased were perfectly sober at the time they went into the Potomac, and had not been intoxicated during the day.