

## Henry Stephen Fox

( - 13 Oct 1846)

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**Fox.** On Tuesday last at his residence in this city after a protracted illness, the Rt. Hon. Henry Stephen Fox, late her Britannic Majesty's Minister Plenipotentiary to the government of the United States.

*The National Intelligencer, Saturday, October 17, 1846*

The Funeral of the late Mr. Fox took place yesterday, all the arrangements for which having (in the absence of Mr. Pakenham) been directed by Mr. Crampton, Secretary of the British Legation. The funeral was attended by the President of the United States (Polk), the Heads of Departments, the Diplomatic Corps, and many of our most respectable citizens.

The religious services were impressively, performed by the Rev. Mr. French, of the Protestant Episcopal Church.

The Pall Bearers were --

The Secretary of State,  
Major General Scott,  
The Minister of Russia,  
The Minister of France,  
Commodore Warrington,  
The Major of Washington (Seaton)

The remains of the deceased were conveyed to the Congressional Cemetery, and deposited in the public vault to await the instructions of his connections in England.

Uncle was Charles James Fox (1749-1806) British Statesman. One of the great orators of his day; one of Pitt's chief rivals and opponents; dissipated, but honest and progressive in public affairs; advocated religious freedom, abolition of slave trade, electoral reform and other liberal causes; foreign secretary 1782-83 and 1806; supported the cause of the American colonists by his speeches in Parliament.

*Columbia Historical Society, Volume 19, page 34*

Mr. Fox was one of the most distinguished diplomatists whom the United Kingdom has ever sent to represent its interests in this capital. He was the grandson of that General Fox who led the British troops against the colonists at the battle of Lexington and the nephew of the renowned statesman Charles Fox. The British Legation was at that time located in a tall brick building on the corner of 23rd and Pennsylvania Avenue and was afterwards the home of Slidell of the Slidell-Mason episode. It is now occupied by St. Ann's Infant Asylum.

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Vaughan's successor, Henry Stephen Fox, minister for eight years, 1836-1844, was of a very different kidney. He was forty-five years old, with a long line of distinguished ancestors which included Charles II and Henry of Navarre. Like most old bachelors he was queer, but unlike most of them he was extraordinarily queer. It is fairest to Fox to draw first a description of him from the pen of one of his cultivated countrymen, James B. Buckingham, Esquire, who in 1838 visited Washington:

[Fox] has the reputation of being amiable and learned; but he is so rarely seen, either in his own house or out of it, that it is regarded as quite an event to have met with him. His appearance indicates feeble health; and his habits are quite sufficient to account for this. Instead of rising at four in the morning, like the ex-president, John Quincy Adams, he goes to the opposite extreme, of not quitting his bed till one or two in the afternoon; and he avoids mingling with society, either at home or elsewhere, as if it were naturally distasteful to him. Book-auctions, which are frequent here, sometimes tempt him, but scarcely anything else can draw him out. He has the reputation of being a great entomologist, and it is said that his greatest happiness consists in the frequent receipt of cases of insects from the various parts of the world. ----- (J.S. Buckingham, *America: Historical, Statistic, and Descriptive* [2 vols., 1841] I, 235-36)

Apropos of times of rising, one recalls the case of the French philosopher Descartes, whose life-long habit was to get up at noon. While spending a winter in Stockholm, the Queen of Sweden insisted on his rising at five o'clock in the morning. He died before the winter was over. The moral seems to be, don't let the Queens of Sweden bluff you out of a habit that you like.

Some further account of Minister Fox is largely derived from the book of Mrs. Seaton mentioned above: He was excessively thin, with the cadaverous complexion of a confirmed opium-eater. Scrupulously neat, he wore a blue swallow-tailed coat made by a Rio de Janeiro tailor. His high collar extended almost to the crown of his head, and his large hat suggested that of a West India planter. He always carried a huge, green silk umbrella. He never entertained women, as he disdained to shake hands with them. He knew his colleagues only by candle-light. At a funeral of one of them, he remarked, "How very odd we all look by daylight." He played at cards for high stakes, and never paid a debt if he could avoid it. On one occasion his creditors surrounded the legation and demanded that he name a definite date for satisfying their claims. He appeared at a window and announced, "The Day of Judgment." One of his famous mots is recorded by Lord Byron, "I met the other day Henry Fox, who has been dreadfully ill, and, as he says, 'so changed that his oldest creditor would not know him.'"

Fox's legation was the Kuhn House, which was built in the 'twenties by Capt. Joseph L. Kuhn, paymaster in the Marine Corps. It was on the south side of K Street between 24th Street and Washington Circle, just west of the circle. It now forms the northeast part of St. Ann's Infant Asylum. Its appearance, both inside and out, is much the same as in Fox's day. He continued to occupy this house after the appointment of his successor and he died there on October 13, 1846. His tomb is in the Congressional Cemetery.

When in 1842 Charles Dickens visited Washington he put up at Fuller's Hotel on Pennsylvania Avenue, and was entertained by Fox at the British legation.

In connection with the death of Hon. Henry Stephen Fox, a copy of the following letter from the President of the United States was found in the cemetery records:

"Washington, 16 Sept. 1847.

Sir:

You are hereby requested to set apart in the Congressional Burial Ground an appropriate spot for the interment of the body of the late Mr. Fox, formerly Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of her Britannic Majesty to the United States.

Yours respectfully,  
James K. Polk

Robert Clarke, Esq.  
Sexton of the Congressional  
Burial Ground."