

Samuel Humphreys

(23 Nov 1778 – 16 Aug 1846)

The National Intelligencer, Tuesday, August 18, 1846

We regret to learn that Col. Samuel Humphreys, Chief Naval Constructor in the Naval Service of the United States, died suddenly on Sunday, of apoplexy, in Georgetown. This highly respected gentleman was in the 68th year of his age, and had been in the service of the United States for more than thirty-three years.

The National Intelligencer, Wednesday, August 19, 1846

The Late Col. Samuel Humphreys

The sudden death, at his residence in Georgetown, D.C., of Col. Samuel Humphreys, Chief Naval Constructor, was briefly announced in our last.

Colonel Humphreys was the son of Joshua Humphreys, of Philadelphia, the first United States Naval Constructor, who has left us the "Constitution" and "United States," the finest ships that grace the ocean, as monuments of his skill. These vessels were planned by him and built in the year 1797, and, what is remarkable, as showing the cast and character of his mind, he had never seen a frigate when he planned them, and yet he built frigates which to this day have never been surpassed, and which are the pride of the nation. Indeed, the father of Col. Humphreys, by his skill, may be said to have effected a complete revolution in the whole science of Naval Architecture, causing the old "wooden walls" of England to be replaced with vessels quite of another sort. Great Britain, finding that her ships could not compete with those modeled by him, has, since the war, made the "United States" and "Constitution" the guide for her architects. Her old frigates have been broken up, and she is at this day razing her old 74's, building larger frigates, and modeling her whole navy upon the Humphreys plan, which is set forth in his official reports and letters, made and written half a century ago. They may be seen by turning to the American State Papers, Volume 1.

His son, the subject of this notice, was educated by his father as a naval constructor also, of which art he was a master. Some of the most beautiful ships in the navy are of his models. He was appointed Naval Constructor for the Philadelphia navy yard in 1813, and Chief Naval Constructor in 1826, which posts he filled with advantage to his country and honor to himself; the latter till the day of his death.

Neither in the fierceness of party excitement, nor in the cravings for office, nor in the blackest days of proscription did the tongue of malice ever assail him. Upright in all his dealings, faithful to his country and himself, he was a man beloved and respected by all who knew him. He has left a large family and circle of friends to mourn his loss.

Will of Samuel Humphreys, residing at Georgetown, D.C. (dtd. Oct. 31, 1842, probated Aug. 21, 1846/Jan. 22, 1847; Book 6, pp. 41-42; O.S. 2673; Box 18)

All property be placed with wife Letitia during her widowhood, for keeping daughters and youngest son, William Penn Humphreys (who is a minor) together; at wife's death income to be for maintenance of daughters Jane Murray McCrabb, a widow, Catharine Miller Humphreys, and Mary Humphreys, as long as they remain single, and for the education and maintenance of youngest son William Penn Humphreys who is to have a collegiate education; if youngest son receives appointment as midshipman in the U.S. Navy, he shall be maintained except for his clothing so long only as he shall remain on shore and so near to them as to live with them, until he shall attain the age of 22 years.

Exr.: may be one of my sons who shall be appointed by a majority of his brothers and sisters

Wits.: B.M. Voorhees; John H. Reily; oath of Jeremiah Orme to handwriting of testator, indicates date of will is Jan. 31, 1842.