

William Pinkney (17 Mar 1764 – 25 Feb 1822)

The National Intelligencer, Tuesday, February 26, 1822

We regret extremely to announce the dangerous illness of Mr. Pinkney, the distinguished Senator from the state of Maryland, at his lodgings in this city. He was taken suddenly ill a week ago, in the night succeeding great exertions in arguing a case in the Supreme Court; and his life is now despaired of. At one time yesterday, a rumor of his death reached the Capitol, and caused the adjournment of the House of Representatives, and, we believe, also of the Supreme Court. It proved untrue; but the event is one which there is only too much reason to apprehend may have taken place before this paper issues from the press.



Library of Congress

The National Intelligencer, Wednesday, February 27, 1822

The death of Mr. Pinkney absorbs the attention of those whose public labors it is a part of our vocation to record. The deep interest which is felt on the occasion is attested by the Proceedings, yesterday, in the Senate and House of Representatives, and in the Supreme Court. We shall not attempt to swell the torrent by the addition of the tribute due from us to his public character. It shall be silently paid, leaving to other and abler hands the task of compiling a Memoir of this distinguished man, which shall be worthy of the subject.

The National Intelligencer, Thursday, February 28, 1822

The funeral of the late William Pinkney took place yesterday, from the Capitol, agreeably to the arrangements adopted by the Committee of the Senate.

At 10 o'clock the Committee of Arrangements, Pall-bearers, and Mourners, attended at Brown's Hotel, the late lodgings of the deceased, and the corpse was removed, in charge of the Committee of Arrangements, attended by the Sergeant-at-Arms of the Senate, to the Senate Chamber. The House of Representatives entered the Chamber, preceded by its officers; the members of the Executive branch of the Government; the Judges of the Supreme Court; the Foreign Ministers, and as many citizens as could obtain admission on the floor or in the galleries, also attended, where Divine Service was performed by the Rev. Mr. Ryland, Chaplain of the Senate.

At eleven o'clock the funeral moved from the Senate Chamber to the place of interment in the following order:

- The Chaplains of both Houses
- Physicians who attended the deceased
- Committee of Arrangements
- Pall-Bearers
- Mr. Lowrie B Mr. James Brown
- Mr. Dickerson o Mr. Otis
- Mr. R.M. Johnson d Mr. Elliott
- y

Relatives of the deceased, and
The Senator and Representatives from the State of Maryland, as mourners
The Sergeant-at-Arms of the Senate of the United States
The Senate of the United States, preceded by the President pro tempore, and Secretary
The Sergeant-at-Arms of the House of Representatives
The House of Representatives, preceded by their Speaker and Clerk
The Supreme Court and Bar
The Heads of Departments
Foreign Ministers
Citizens and Strangers

The gentleman of the Bar are respectfully requested to convene at the Supreme Court Room at half past 10 o'clock this morning to unite with the Court in attending the funeral of the deceased brother, the honorable William Pinkney. T. Ringgold, Marshall.

Vice Presidents & Cabinet Members
Attorney General: William Pinkney

William Pinkney, Attorney General in the Cabinet of President James Madison, was born on March 17, 1764 in Annapolis, Maryland, the son of Jonathan and Ann (Rind) Pinkney. When his father's property was confiscated because of his Loyalist views during the Revolution, William, at the age of thirteen, had to withdraw from King William School in Annapolis. As a result of his education being cut short, he devoted the rest of his life to studies. He supported the Revolutionary cause and often served guard with the Continental troops.

Samuel Chase invited Pinkney to study law in his office. Will began his studies in February 1783 and was admitted to the bar in 1786. He then moved to Hartford County, Maryland where he began his legal practice. Pinkney was elected to the state convention which ratified the new Constitution in April 1788, although he personally voted against it. He served in the Maryland House of Delegates from October 1788 until 1792. In 1789 he advocated abolition of slavery. William married Ann Maria Rodgers on March 16, 1789. They had ten children including the author Edward Coate Pinkney.

William Pinkney was elected to the House of Representatives in 1790, but his election was disputed because he did not live in the district which chose him. After successfully contesting this challenge he decided not to serve. William was next elected to the state executive council in 1792, serving until his resignation in 1795. He was chairman of the council at that time. He was elected a delegate to the legislature from Anne Arundel County in 1795.

Recognizing his legal talent, President Washington appointed Pinkney along with Christopher Gore a commissioner under article seven of the Jay Treaty to settle the United States' claims against Britain. He served for eight years in London, learning a great deal which added to his cultural and legal knowledge. Returning to the United States in 1804, he moved to Baltimore from Annapolis. The British soon began to condemn American shipping again, and Pinkney drafted a "Memorial to the Merchants of Baltimore, on the Violation of our Neutral Rights" in 1806.

In 1806 President Jefferson appointed Pinkney to aid Minister James Monroe in London to deal with the British Government in regard to reparations and impressment. They signed a treaty which did not bind the British, and Jefferson repudiated it. When Monroe left England, Pinkney remained as Minister in October 1807. Pinkney was then involved in the complications cause by the attack on the "Chesapeake" by the "Leopard." He tried to get reparations from the British. In addition William tried to convince the British to withdraw the Orders in Council which interfered with American shipping.

Pinkney finally broke off relations on February 28, 1811 convinced that war would soon break out. He returned to the United States shortly thereafter.

On December 11, 1811 President Madison named William Pinkney Attorney General in which office he served from January 6, 1812 until his resignation on February 10, 1814. He maintained an eminent position in the American legal profession. He also supported the War of 1812 in pamphlets published under the name of "Publius." His resignation came when Congress was considering a bill requiring that the Attorney General reside at the capitol.

William Pinkney served as a major of the Maryland militia during the War of 1812 and participated in the Battle of Bladensburg where he was wounded in the arm. He was elected to the House of Representatives from Baltimore, serving in the Fourteenth Congress from March 4, 1815 to April 18, 1816. He resigned to accept appointment as Minister to Russia. He was to go to Naples first on a special mission to get compensation for losses sustained in 1809 when the Murat regime seized American ships. He was not able to gain the compensation. In Russia Pinkney was able to gain the recall of every Russian diplomat in the United States but was unable to negotiate a commercial treaty. He improved relations between Russia and the United States. He left Russia in February 1818 without receiving his recall.

Pinkney was elected to the United States Senate to fill the vacancy left by the death of Alexander Contee Hanson, serving from December 1, 1819 until his death in 1822. He favored the slave estates and was able to bring about the Missouri Compromise. His legal talents were expressed in his arguments in *McCulloch vs. Maryland* and *Cohens vs. Virginia*. He was renowned for his speaking abilities. William Pinkney died on February 25, 1822 in Washington D.C. and was buried in the Congressional Cemetery.

Biographical Directory of the United States Congress 1774-1989

A Representative and Senator from Maryland; born in Annapolis, Md., on March 17, 1764; pursued classical studies; studied medicine but did not practice; studied law, was admitted to the bar in 1786 and commenced practice in Harford County, Md.; member of the State constitutional convention in 1788; served in the State house of delegates 1789-1792; elected to the 2nd Congress, and served from March 4, 1791 to November of that year when he resigned, the question of ineligibility having been raised on account of non-residence; member of the Executive Council of Maryland 1792-95; again a member of the State house of delegates in 1795; one of the commissioners at London under Jay's treaty 1796-1804; attorney general of Md. in 1805; joint minister of Great Britain with James Monroe in 1806 and 1807 and minister plenipotentiary 1807-1811; returned to Baltimore in 1811; served in the State senate; appointed Attorney General of the U.S. in the Cabinet of President Madison, and served from Dec. 11, 1811 to Feb. 10, 1814; wounded at the Battle of Bladensburg, Md. Aug. 24, 1814; elected to the 14th Congress and served from Mar. 4, 1815 to April 18, 1816 when he resigned; appointed by President Madison minister plenipotentiary to Russia with a special mission to Naples and served from 1816 - 1818; elected to the U.S. Senate to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Alexander Contee Hanson, and served from Dec. 21, 1819 until his death in Washington D.C. Feb. 25, 1822; interment in the Congressional Cemetery.

The Dictionary of American Biography

William Pinkney, statesman. Born in Annapolis, Md., March 17, 1764; died in Washington, February 25, 1822. His father was an Englishman by birth and was a loyalist during the American Revolution. Young Pinkney showed his independent spirit as a boy by joining the patriotic side. Owing to the

troubled state of the times, his early education was imperfect, but he made up for this deficiency by diligent application as he approached manhood. He first chose medicine as a profession, but becoming acquainted with Judge Samuel Chase, who offered to take him as a pupil, he began the study of law at Baltimore in 1783, and three years afterward was admitted to the bar. He practiced successfully in Harford county, Md., for a few years, and was sent from that district in 1788 to the State convention that ratified the constitution of the United States. In the same year he was elected to the house of delegates, in which he continued to represent Harford county till his return to Annapolis in 1792. His speeches in the legislature by his natural eloquence and his pure and felicitous diction won for him more than a local reputation. From 1792 till 1795 he was a member of the executive council of Maryland. In 1796 President Washington appointed him a commissioner on the part of the United States, under Jay's British treaty of 1794, to determine the claim of American merchants to compensation for losses and damages by acts of the English government. This was the beginning of his diplomatic career abroad. The particular service, involving the consideration of many nice questions of admiralty law, gave employment to Pinkney's best powers. He remained in England until 1804, when he returned home and resumed the practice of the law in Baltimore. The next year he was appointed attorney-general of the state of Maryland. In 1806 he was again sent to England as commissioner, jointly with James Monroe, to treat with the English government respecting its continued aggression, in violation of the rights of neutrals. When Mr. Monroe retired in 1807, Pinkney was left as resident minister in London, in which post he remained until President Madison recalled him in 1811, at his own earnest solicitation. On his return to Maryland he was elected a member of the state senate, and at the close of the year President Madison appointed him attorney-general of the United States. He was an earnest advocate of the war of 1812, and defended the policy of the government both by his pen and sword, being wounded at the battle of Bladensburg while leading a company of riflemen. In 1814 he resigned his post as attorney-general when the law was passed requiring that officer to reside at the seat of government. In 1815 he was elected to congress from Baltimore, but he resigned the next year on being appointed by President Monroe minister to Russia and special envoy to Naples. He remained abroad two years, but, feeling the want of his legal income, he resigned in 1818, returned to Baltimore, and resumed the practice of his profession. He was engaged in most of the chief cases in the supreme court of the United States during the next four years. In 1820 he was elected to the U.S. senate and took an active part in the discussion on the admission of Missouri into the Union. He continued also his labors in the supreme court, and while engaged in his double duties at the bar and in the senate he was attacked by the illness that terminated his life.

From the Baltimore Sun

Anne Arundel History

February 26, 2006

1822: The death of Mayor Pinkney

William Pinkney, the mayor of Annapolis in 1794 and 1795, died Feb. 25, 1822. Two centuries later, residents and visitors can stroll along Pinkney Street in Annapolis in the historic district. One of the elegant late 18th century residences intact in the city, the William Paca House, is at 18 Pinkney St. and is open to the public as a museum and garden.

Pinkney, a lawyer and diplomat, saw the last years of the Colonial era as a youth and helped provide some of the intellectual candlepower of the young republic. His birthplace of Annapolis was just the first stop for Pinkney, who also served in Congress in the House and the Senate, as minister to Russia and as attorney general in the Cabinet of President James Madison during the War of 1812. He was wounded in that war during the Battle of Bladensburg in the summer of 1814. He spent the last three years of his life in the U.S. Senate. He is buried in the Congressional Cemetery in Washington.

[Sources: Biographical Directory of the United States Congress; Sun library researcher Paul McCardell]

Bibliography:

Brant, Irving. James Madison: The President, 1809-1812. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1941.

Brant, Irving. James Madison: Commander in Chief, 1812-1816. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1961.

Elliot, Ian, ed. James Madison, 1751-1836. Dobb's Ferry, N.Y.: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1969.

Hagan, Horace H. Eight Great American Lawyers. Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Company, 1923.

Hunt, Gaillard. The Life of James Madison. New York: Russell and Russell, 1968.

Letters and Other Writings of James Madison. 8 vols. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Company, 1865.

Lewis, William Draper, ed. Great American Lawyers, vol. II. Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1907-1909

Pinkney, Rev. William. New York: D. Appleton and