

Frederick W. Royce

(1839 – 16 Nov 1900)

Royce. Suddenly on Friday, November 16, 1900 at 9:30 a.m., Frederick W. Royce. Funeral from his late residence, 1141 12th street northwest on Monday, November 19 at 11 o'clock a.m. Friends invited. Interment private.

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Stricken and Died

Mr. Frederick W. Royce a Victim of Apoplexy

Widely Known, Highly Esteemed

Famed as a Telegraph Operator and Electrician

Sketch of His Career

Mr. Frederick W. Royce, inventor, electrician and veteran telegraph operator, was stricken with apoplexy this morning shortly after 9 o'clock in front of the city post office building, and died a few minutes after having been taken to the Emergency Hospital. Mr. Royce was one of the most widely known residents of the District, having lived here for more than forty years. He was also known to all of the older telegraphers in the country, having had an interesting experience as an operator in the ante-bellum days.

Mr. Royce's sudden death was a distinct shock. Some years ago he was not in the best of health, but lately he had improved and often spoke of enjoying better physical conditions than he had known for a long time past. He seemed perfectly well when he left his home at 1141 12th street this morning to go down town to his temporary office in the Kellogg building on F street. Mr. Royce was engaged with Mr. Charles Moore in working on some mechanical devices the two had in mind, and was giving much of his time to the matter.

Having some business which demanded his attention at the post office, Mr. Royce walked from his office to that building. When in front of the structure he reeled and fell to the pavement. Assistance was speedily summoned, and the ambulance from the Emergency Hospital arrived within a few minutes. Mr. Royce was unconscious. He was hurried to the hospital, but was in a dying condition before the institution was reached. Coroner Nevitt viewed the remains and gave a certificate of death from apoplexy. Arrangements for the funeral have not been completed. A son of Mr. Royce, Mr. Frederick Royce, jr., who is the New England traveling freight agent of the Baltimore and Ohio railroad, with headquarters in New York has been telegraphed for.

Mr. Royce was sixty-one years old. His wife, who has been quite ill for some time past, is now in a serious, almost critical condition, and may not recover. Aside from the son mentioned, Mr. Royce leaves one other boy, Morgan Royce, and a married daughter, Mrs. Joseph C. Latimer.

Showed Wonderful Speed

One of the first men to send a message on the old printing telegraph instruments, Mr. Royce became the most expert of telegraphers in the country engaged in that feature of the service. He was long renowned as a sender of press telegrams, and had often attained a maximum speed of sixty words a minute, or 3,600 words an hour. This was twice as fast as the Morse instruments could be operated then, and was faster than can be sent nowadays, even with the approved appliances and the use of typewriters in receiving. The old printing telegraph machines have gone out of service almost entirely

now, on account of the protests made against the character of the messages, the long strips being unwieldy for newspaper matter and difficult to file by mercantile concerns.

A native of Delaware, Mr. Royce went from Wilmington to Albany, and New York city, and thence to Baltimore, following his profession as an operator. He came to Washington about 1858 from the monumental city. In Baltimore he was one of the youngest and withal the most expert of the operators employed by the House Printing Telegraph Company, which together with the New York and Washington Printing Telegraph Company, was absorbed by the American Telegraph Company.

Career in Washington

It was when this deal took place that Mr. Royce came to this city, serving with the American company in its old quarters on Pennsylvania avenue, near 4 1/2 street. The printing telegraph instrument was then in its heyday. The sending apparatus consisted of a key-board resembling that of a typewriter. As the keys were pressed the letter was recorded by the companion machine at the other end of the circuit.

In 1866 the American Telegraph Company, which, after having absorbed the Morse company, was swept up by the Western Union Company. Mr. Royce then came into the employ of the latter company and remained with it until 1890. By that time he had engaged in a number of business enterprises. The printing system of telegraphy had practically become obsolete, too. So, when, in 1890, a fire in the New York office of the Western Union Company destroyed the companion instrument of the printing circuit between Washington and Baltimore, Mr. Royce finally severed connection with telegraphic work.

He devoted himself in assisting Mr. Moore with his work on what is now the Mergenthaler linotype, or typesetting machine, in use in nearly all of the larger newspaper offices. He also became senior member of the firm of Royce & Marean, electrical contractors, continuing in that business until the dissolution of partnership about two years ago.

Genial and Popular

Mr. Royce was a man of happy disposition. He possessed a fund of anecdotes of the earlire days of telegraphy, when all the printing telegraph operators in the country were known to each other. He was with the American Telegraph Company when the Washington office was managed by Mr. A.B. Talcott, the venerable electrician of the Capitol and former superintendent of the District fire alarm system. Mr. Royce married Miss Laura Davis, whose father was a prominent grocer of the capital city for many years.

Unquestionably Mr. Royce was one of the most noted telegraphers of his day. He worked with a number of men who have since become famous. A little incident is told of the visit of former Governor Bullock of Georgia to the telegraph offices in this city a number of years ago. The manager was showing the distinguished southerner every attention, and, taking him to where the printing telegraph instruments were introduced him to Mr. Royce.

"Why, hello, Rufe," said the latter, rising eagerly from his chair.

He had been associated with the governor in earlier days.