

## John Harrison Semmes

( - 7 Jan 1898)

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*The Evening Star, March 24, 1861*

### Fire

Yesterday afternoon, between three and four o'clock, fire broke out in the roof of the back kitchen attached to the premises owned by Mr. John H. Semmes, and occupied by Mr. A.W. Burch, in Ninth street, opposite the western end of the Centre Market. It seems that a person who lives next door to the place fired went out on the roof in question with a small cooking furnace, with which he proceeded to do some cooking. The wind was blowing a small hurricane at the time, and the concern was capsized upon the tar and gravel roof, and in a minute or two the blaze burst forth. The Franklin engine was soon on the spot and at work, and by the efforts of its members the fire was confined to the kitchen, which it partially destroyed before it was extinguished. Mr. Burch is of the opinion that his neighbor had better do his cooking on his own premises in future.

*The Evening Star, January 3, 1898*

### Illness of John H. Semmes

Mr. John Harrison Semmes is lying serious ill at his residence in Chevy Chase, and, owing to his advanced age, his recovery is believed to be doubtful. Mr. Semmes was born in Georgetown 75 years ago, his father, who was a brother of the famous Admiral Raphael Semmes, having emigrated from England and settled there. Mr. Semmes, in spite of his advanced age, has preserved an active interest in everyday affairs and attended to his business interests with all the zeal and energy which characterized his early years. Christmas day he came into the city and was waiting for a car on Pennsylvania avenue and 10th street when he was seized with an attack of vertigo. He fell to the pavement and cut a severe gash over his right eye. This wound was sewed up at the Emergency Hospital, whence Mr. Semmes returned to his suburban home. He did not appear to be very much the worse for his injury, and spent the evening with his family, retiring to bed at his usual hour. Sunday morning it was found that he was in a very precarious condition. He was unconscious. He was first visited by Dr. J.D. Morgan, and is now under the charge of Dr. Cuthbert. The injury received Christmas day caused a severe shock to his already weakened system, and, in addition, symptoms of paralysis were apparent. Mr. Semmes rallied slightly Friday night under the effects of nitro-glycerine, and was conscious next morning. Mrs. Semmes, Miss Semmes, Mrs. Calhoun and Mrs. Desse, the children of Mr. Semmes, are in attendance upon him.

**Semmes.** At Chevy Chase, Maryland, Friday morning, January 7, 1898, John Harrison Semmes. Service at the house Monday, June 10th at 11 o'clock. Interment private. Kindly omit flowers.

*The Evening Star, January 7, 1898*

### Death of John H. Semmes

#### A Native of the District, Where He Lived All His Life

Once Prominent in Business Circles and Identified With the Movements That Advanced the City. Mr. John Harrison Semmes died shortly before noon today at his residence at Chevy Chase, Mr. Semmes had been seriously ill ever since he suffered an attack of vertigo and fell on Pennsylvania avenue a couple of weeks ago. His head was cut and an attack of paraysis followed. His system, weakened by age

and constant exertion, could not withstand the strain, and his death had been expected to occur at any time.

He was seventy-five years old, and was born in Georgetown, his father settling there after immigration from England. His father's brother was Admiral Raphael Semmes of the navy.

For many years Mr. Semmes was one of the most prominent and active businessmen in Washington, and was connected with nearly every enterprise looking to the advancement of the city. He was the builder and long-time owner of the Seaton House, on Louisiana avenue, afterward occupied by the city post office, and was for years the head of the important grocery firm of John H. Semmes & Co., located at 9th street and Pennsylvania avenue. He was a man of most rigid conscientiousness in all his dealings. Business reverses overtook him, but he never relinquished his energy or purpose, and up to the time of his recent sickness attended to his affairs with all the zeal of one half his age.

Every morning in summer he would leave Chevy Chase at 6 o'clock, and in the winter at a few minutes past that hour, and this custom he kept up to the day of his accident. He leaves a widow and three daughters, Miss Semmes, Mrs. Leon Dessez and Mrs. Colhoun. Arrangements for the funeral have not been completed, but it will take place Monday, at the interment will be in Congressional cemetery.

*The Washington Post, January 8, 1898, p. 7*

### **John Harrison Semmes Dead**

#### **Passing of Prominent Figure from Circle of Older Business Men**

One of the most prominent and active of the older business men of Washington, Mr. John Harrison Semmes, died yesterday shortly before noon at his residence at Chevy Chase. About two weeks ago Mr. Semmes succumbed to an attack of vertigo and fell on Pennsylvania avenue. His head was severely cut and an attack of paralysis ensued. To such a strain his system, weakened by advanced age, and constant exertion, proved unequal, and his death had been half expected at any time since the accident.

The deceased was born in Georgetown seventy-five years ago, his father having settled there on migrating from England. His father's brother was Admiral Raphael Semmes, of the Confederate Navy. For many years Mr. Semmes has been identified with every movement that had for its object the improvement of Washington. In business he was as conscientious as he was successful, and the business house of which he was the head, the grocery firm of John H. Semmes & Co., was for years the most important in the city. Financial reverses overtook him after his retirement from active commercial life, but did not daunt him, for up to the time of the accident which led to his death, Mr. Semmes devoted himself to his private business affairs with all the devotion that marked the earlier years of his life.

A widow and three daughters, Miss Semmes, Mrs. Leon Dessez, and Mrs. Calhoun, survive him. Services will be held at the late residence, Monday at 11 o'clock. The interment will be in Congressional Cemetery and will be private.