

John Antonio Sousa

(29 Sep 1824 – 27 Apr 1892)

Sousa. On April 27, 1892 at 2 p.m., Antonio Sousa beloved husband of Elizabeth Sousa after a long illness, aged 68 years. Funeral from Christ Church, Navy Yard, Friday, April 29 at 3 p.m. Friends and relatives invited.

The Evening Star, April 28, 1892

Death of Antonio Sousa

After prolonged suffering Mr. Antonio Sousa died at his residence in this city yesterday of a complication of diseases. He was born in Seville, Spain, September 24, 1824, and came to this country in 1854 and became a member of the Marine Band, from which he was retired in 1879 with the rank of first class. He was a member of Naval Lodge, No. 4, F.A.A.M., and George Meade Post, G.A.R. He leaves a widow and seven children. The funeral will occur Friday at 3 p.m. from Christ Church, Navy Yard and the remains will be temporarily placed in a vault. Mr. Sousa was the father of Mr. John Philip Sousa, leader of the Marine Band, who is now making a tour of the west with his band.

Source, p. 241

In various documents the name Sousa appears as Soussa, Sioussa, Sioucca, Soucca, Souca, Souza, Sausa, and Saucca. Actually, the name is Sousa and is of Portuguese origin. Among the distinguished Portuguese ancestors of John Antonio Sousa are Thomas de Sousa, the first Captain General of Brazil; Alfonse de Sousa, Viceroy of India; Goncalo de Sousa, Chief Justice of Portugal; and Louis de Sousa, a writer. John Philip pronounced his name Soo'-sa. The public, however, has always pronounced it Soo'-za.

John Antonio Sousa was named after his father, and his mother's name was Josephine de Blanco. During the Peninsular War, probably in 1822, John Antonio's parents fled Portugal for political reasons and settled in Seville, Spain. There John Antonio was born on September 22, 1824. He evidently received an excellent education and could speak several languages by his early teens, at which time he left home. (According to a family story, he was interested in the stage and would slip out at night to attend performances. One night the home was burglarized when he left it unguarded, and he fled home to escape punishment.) He went to Italy and then became an interpreter aboard a British warship. It is possible that he spent some time in Britain. Little is known of his activities during the next few years, but he received a bullet wound in the arm, presumably during his service with the British Navy in the Amazon. After his duty with the British Navy he joined the United States Navy. He is believed to have served during the latter part of the Mexican War in 1847 or 1848. During this period he acquired the classification of musician, but it is not known what instrument or instruments he played.

He was stationed in Brooklyn, New York, as a musician at the Navy Yard about 1848. While there he met his future wife, Marie Elisabeth Trinkaus. The Sousa's moved to Washington, D.C., early in 1854, and John Antonio enlisted in the U.S. Marine Band on March 23, 1854.

Antonio was of the Catholic faith until late 1854 or early 1855, at which time he turned Protestant. (There are two family stories about how Antonio came to change his religion. According to one, he was upset about a priest's unwillingness to come to his home in the rain when his child, Josephine, died. Another story holds that he was attended by friendly Masons once when he was ill, later joined the order, and then met with the disfavor of his church.) At first he attended the Concordia German

Evangelical Church (Lutheran) and later Christ Episcopal Church. As a Catholic he had attended St. Peter's Church in Washington and had sung bass in the choir there.

During the Civil War period he served with the Marine Band, playing trombone and fife, and he probably saw actual combat too. He continued his service with the Marine Band as a trombonist and served almost twenty-five years. He retired on March 1, 1879, and spent the rest of his life in Washington working as a cabinetmaker and upholsterer. He was a Mason, being a member of Naval Lodge No. 4 in Washington, and he also belonged to the George Meade Post, Grand Army of the Republic. He died on April 27, 1892, and is buried in Congressional Cemetery. (The Antonio Sousa plot consists of three adjoining burial lots. Three people would normally be buried in this space, but the graves are deep and the caskets are stacked. The bodies of eleven people are buried in this plot. They are: John Antonio and Marie Elisabeth Sousa; their children Josephine, Ferdinand, Rosina, Annie Frances, and Antonio A.; and four others not identified. Sometime after Antonio's death, John Philip had the present monument erected.

[Note: Father of John Phillip Sousa.]