

## Thomas Tingey (1750 – 23 Feb 1829)

---

*The National Intelligencer, February 24, 1829*

At the Navy Yard in this City, about 19 o'clock a.m., yesterday, aged 79 years, Commodore Thomas Tingey, Commandant of that Yard, and for twenty eight years a resident of this City in that capacity.



To his exalted worth every one who has ever known him will bear testimony. His irreproachable character must be to his bereaved widow and affectionate children an invaluable legacy.

His commission in the Navy was nearly coeval with its existence. For almost fifty years he has sustained the character of an officer of the Navy with unsullied reputation.

As the head of a family, he was a venerable and true patriarch. As a man, he was humane, kind, and generous. As a citizen, faithful and loyal.

His death, though it has happened to him in the fullness of years, will be mourned by all who knew him. The friends and acquaintances, and those of the family, and the Officers of the Army and Navy, generally, are respectfully requested to attend the funeral without more particular invitation.

Legionary Order -- The volunteer companies of the 1st Battalion, 2d Legion, 1st Brigade of the Militia of the District, will parade in front of the Navy Yard gate, on Wednesday morning, the 25th instant, at 11 o'clock, for the purpose of paying funeral honors to the late Commodore Tingey.

By order, Thos. B. Reily, Actg. Adjt.

*The National Intelligencer, February 25, 1829*

### **Naval General Order**

As a mark of respect to the memory of Commodore Thomas Tingey, late of the United States Navy, who died this morning at 10 o'clock; the Flags of the Navy Yards, Stations, and Vessels, of the United States Navy, are to be hoisted half-mast, and thirteen minute guns fired at noon, on the day after the receipt of this Order. Officers of the Navy and Marine Corps are to wear crape for thirty days.

Navy Department, February 23d, 1829

### *Columbian Light Infantry -- Attention*

Pursuant to Legionary Orders, the corps will parade this day, at 11 o'clock, each man provided with three rounds of blank cartridge. The Company will muster and be formed on Garrison Street, near the Navy Yard Gate, its right resting on L Street. By order, P.F. Nash, Feb. 25, 1829 First Sergeant

*The National Intelligencer, April 3, 1817*

Tingey, Comm. Thomas of the Navy and Miss Ann Eveline Craven were married March 19 at Ainwell N.J. by the Rev. Mr. Kirkpatrick.

*The Evening Star, November 23, 1906, p. 12*

### **The Tingey Tablet**

#### **Memorial to Man Who Laid Out Washington Navy Yard**

A bronze tablet has been placed on the commandant's house at the navy yard in memory of Capt. Thomas Tingey, U.S.N., who laid out the yard in 1800, and from that date was its commandant until his death there in 1829. Capt. Tingey, who was very popular with the citizens of Washington, may fitly be styled "The Father of the Washington Navy Yard.."

The unveiling will take place Wednesday the 28th instant, at 11 o'clock in the forenoon. The exercises will be simple, consisting of a brief address by Frank W. Hackett, ex-assistant secretary of the navy, to be followed by remarks from Secretary Bonaparte. No special invitations have been sent out, but the public generally will be welcomed. It is expected that army and navy officers, members of the Oldest Inhabitants' Association, of the various patriotic societies, of the Columbian Historical Society, and all persons who are interested in the navy yard and its associations, or in the early history of Washington, will take the opportunity to be present.

#### *Historic Houses of George-Town and Washington City*

The Commandant's House, said to have been designed by Latrobe, was not built till 1807. In the passage of years it has been so changed that Latrobe's hand is scarcely apparent--if, indeed he did furnish the original design. The successive occupants present a roster of so many notable personalities that any biographical discussion would exceed the limits of space, but there must be an exception in the case of that early Commandant, Captain or Commodore Tingey--he is referred to by both titles--who lived in the Commandant's House for so many years that he is said to have "bequeathed it in his will, under the mistaken impression that he owned it." As a matter of fact, he died interstate.

Thomas Tingey, son of an English clergyman, was born in London in 1750. As a young man he served in the British Navy until 1771. He then entered the merchant marine. After the Revolutionary War, he commanded ships in the American merchant service and lived in Philadelphia after 1783; after 1797 he lived in Kingston, New Jersey. In the short naval war with France, he was made a Captain in the American Navy, September 3, 1798, senior of five captains added that year. During the following winter he commanded the "Ganges" and two smaller vessels cruising in the Windward Passage, where they took sundry prizes.

In January, 1800, Benjamin Stoddert ordered Captain Tingey to Washington to supervise construction of a 74-gun ship of the line and the improvement of the Navy Yard. In a letter to William Marbury, Stoddert described Tingey as "an officer of great merit and understanding, who has seen the Navy Yards of England."

Through President Jefferson's opposition to a permanent Navy, in the peace establishment of 1801 only nine Captains were retained in the service. Tingey was twelfth in point of seniority and lost his rank as Captain but remained superintendent of the Washington Yard till 1803, then became temporarily "financial agent" and, on November 23, 1804, was re-commissioned Captain and made Commandant of the Yard and Naval Agent, combined duties he continued to perform for the rest of his life. It is worth noting that Captain Tingey's rules for the government of the Washington Navy Yard (1808) were adopted for all other naval stations on the Atlantic Coast.

Captain Tingey did not live in the Yard until the Commandant's House was built in 1807. In the meanwhile he had a house nearby at the northwest corner of 11th and G Streets, S.E. He was an indefatigable worker and a meticulously exacting administrator, but that did not prevent his being also an highly respected and genial social lion. His arrival in Washington started the naval circle that afterwards became so prominent in the city's social life. No ball, banquet or reception was complete without him, up to the time of his death in 1829. But, along with his love of society, a strong sense of

civic responsibility led him to take an active part in public affairs. Amongst other interests, he was concerned with public education and was a school trustee as early as 1805. He headed the Vestry of Christ Church for a long time and was an incorporator of Christ Church Burying-Ground (now the Congressional Cemetery) in which, at last, he was to be buried.

His action at the British invasion has linked his name inseparably with the story of the Navy Yard. He was the last Government official to leave the city and the first to come back.

About 2 o'clock on the afternoon of August 24, 1814, Secretary Jones of the Navy went to the Yard and authorized Captain Tingey to lay trains of powder and make all necessary arrangements to fire the place. About half-past eight in the evening, having definite news that the British were within the city, Tingey ordered the matches applied. When the fires and explosions started, embarking in his gig he was rowed down the Eastern Branch, in full view of the burning Capitol, and spent the night near Alexandria.

Coming back the next morning, he reached the Yard about a quarter before nine. The story of the Navy Yard's destruction is too well known to need repetition, but Captain Tingey's own account of the conditions he found is worth remembering. After noting the demolition of the buildings and the ruin of the shipping, he says:

"It appeared that they [the British] had left the Yard about half an hour when we arrived. I found my dwelling house and that of Lieutenant Haraden untouched by fire, but some of the people of the neighborhood had commenced plundering them; therefore hastily collecting a few persons known to me, I got some of my most valuable materials moved to neighbors' houses out of the Yard, who tendered me their offers to receive them, the enemy's officers having declared private property sacred. Could I have stayed another hour, I had probably saved all my furniture and stores, but being advised by some friends that I was not safe . . . . I therefore again embarked in the gig, taking along out of the Branch one of the new launches, which lay safe . . . . I had no sooner gone than such a scene of devastation and plunder took place in the houses (by the people of the neighborhood) as is disgraceful to relate; not a movable article from the cellars to the garrets has been left and even some of the fixtures and the locks of the doors have been shamefully pillaged."

**Ghosts, Washington's Most Famous Ghost Stories**, John Alexander, The Washington Book Trading Company, 1988

Call it interservice rivalry if you will, but the Navy's original commandant occasionally surveys his old home grounds too. Captain Thomas Tingey supervised the building of the Washington Navy Yard from his home--Quarters A--during the second decade of the nineteenth century. It was also Captain Tingey who personally set fire to the yard in 1814 to keep it from falling into the hands of the advancing British troops; and it was the same Captain Tingey who directed the Navy Yard's reconstruction after the war.

For some twenty-four years, Captain Thomas Tingey lived in the rambling mansion that had been built by Benjamin Latrobe. He and his wife had become quite reluctant to part from it--even in death. Old newspaper articles say that Captain Tingey willed the home to his wife, but the government had other ideas. The Navy fought and won the right to retain possession of the property.

Apparently that bitter battle in the courts didn't sit too well with the spirit of Captain Thomas Tingey. The ghost of the harassed commandant has been seen regularly down through the years--looking out from the upper windows of the mansion--surveying the Navy Yard he helped to build, and defying the Navy to evict him. Some say he holds no malice for his successors, and a few of his successors swear he provided them with inspiration. Captain Thomas Tingey just doesn't seem to want to leave his post.