

## Ambrose White

(16 Jan 1778 – 24 May 1849)

---

*The Evening Star, July 25, 1903, p. 6*

### **Helped Build City**

**Capt. Ambrose L. White and Rev. Henry Foxhall  
They Were Sturdy Citizens and Zealous Patriots --  
Some Reminiscences**

At the foot of New Jersey avenue, south of the Capitol, stood a solid one-arched brick and stone bridge, spanning the canal, which I have good reason to remember from my earliest childhood in the thirties until its demolition by order of Gov. Shepherd, preliminary to filling up that death-trap and contagion-producer, the Washington canal. This bridge was as obstinate, sturdy and well built as its designer, Capt. Ambrose L. White, an Englishman.

Capt. White was my maternal grandfather. Many were his reminiscences, more interesting by far than any I can relate.

The old bridge successfully resisted all the men and weapons, pickaxes, spades and crowbars with which it was assailed. Dynamite cartridges were resorted to, and the explosions, which shook the foundations of the Capitol, brought down the bridge in a stifling cloud of smoke and dust. The old bridge died hard and bravely, but it was used to war. Had it not seen the victorious Hessians of King George march down from the burning and looted White House and Capitol and cross over it, fired upon by the Americans in their triumphant retreat.

Capt. Ambrose L. White came from Lancashire, England, along with or shortly after the Rev. Henry Foxhall, a fellow countryman and brother Methodist. They became contractors and were both zealous Wesleyan Methodists. Foxhall was an all-around iron founder and molder. He had established a gun factory in Washington under a contract with the United States government. It was between the canal mule drive and the Potomac river, about 25th street west, near Georgetown. The building had been or was subsequently a glass manufactory, for often I remember being present there at the weird spectacle of glass blowing, a sight never likely to leave the mind's eye of marveling boyhood.

Foxhall and White obtained many contracts with our benevolent Uncle Sam. Mr. White built bridges over every gutter, gulley and watershed to which he could obtain access on lawful invitation.

During the connection of these two remarkable early citizens of Washington they found time and money to carry out, without bankrupting themselves, certain little fads and fancies of their own, which hurt nobody, if they did not perchance benefit, and from which they never wished or expected to derive the least return this side of the grave.

Henry Foxhall built and established the Foundry Methodist Church in obedience to a vow – of response to his prayers that his foundry should be spared destruction by the British, who were invading Washington city.

### *Built a Chapel*

Ambrose L. White, not to be behind him, joined forces with another good man, a printer, James C. Dunn, and gave half a square of ground in 9th street northwest and built thereon a beautiful Methodist church. These are the things which give us glory. Ambrose White's son John, who had a powerful and melodious voice, led a choir there for some years until he went to New York to live. Then Prof. Daniel took charge and his reputation grew and grew.

There were other just as good men who were linked with that endless chain of benevolence, charity and godliness which broke all other claims, as King George found out. It was the good men as well as the great men who saved the country.

Not more than a block or two above and nearer to the Capitol, on the northeast corner of New Jersey avenue, in a large enclosure of three-quarters of the square at least, Ambrose L. White had built his own simple yet spacious brick home, and here he resided until his death. Here his comrade of the battle of Bladensburg, who eventually won the heart of his first born and favorite child, was married to her.

Shortly after Ambrose L. White had established his home on this spot he reached his door flying from Gen. Ross and the red coats from the last feeble stand of the Americans at Bladensburg, and only entered it to emerge with his trusty rifle in hand and his undaunted, unconquered, patriot spirit within him to take a few parting shots at the triumphant, jeering enemy as they marched past his house on their way over the old bridge to next assail Baltimore.

Coolly, deliberately as any minute man of the revolution, this old Cromwellian hero aimed, discharged and reloaded his trusty rifle and banged away again. A command was given and a force of men was detailed and the swamp fox was traced and hunted to his lair. He flung down his gun and knowing of a place of safety, the hounds soon lost all trace of him.

After prodding with their bayonets every suspected spot, the soldiers resumed the march, but not until they had set fire to the premises. White had been face downward in the narrow space beneath the bake ovens contrived for his family and numerous hands employed in his various enterprises.

There was a Methodist colony crystallizing in the new national capital these days James C. Dunn and Wm. H. Edes and Joseph Radcliffe and Rev. Dr. Gurley, Rev. Henry Slicer, Rev. Geo. G. Cookman, Rev. Dr. Justin, Ulysses Ward, Thomas Purcell, William Woodward and a host of well known and highly esteemed and honored names were one by one added to the list of enterprising citizens, who, in varying interests and industries, elevated and sustained their own fortunes and firmly established the new national capital.

But let us go back to the days of the old brick bridge and the burning and looting of Washington city. The President's house and the Intelligencer office were rifled and burning in the West End and two considerable fires were under full blast on New Jersey avenue southeast. One was the United States Capitol and the other the residence of Ambrose L. White.

Years passed on and White, approaching his 100th year, became totally blind. He enjoyed having read to him the columns of the National Intelligencer, his political bible, in which he most devoutly believed. The old man kept himself well posted.