

John Cameron

(28 Aug 1817 – 14 Jun 1870)

The Evening Star, June 14, 1870

Fatal Accident on the Railroad

A Well-known Washingtonian Killed

We regret to learn that this morning, at 9 1/2 o'clock, Mr. John Cameron, a well-known contractor and stone-mason of this city, a resident of South Washington, was killed on the Washington Branch of the B. and O. R.R., near Mills Bridge, by being struck by a locomotive. Mr. Cameron had walked out to see Mr. Clark Mills, the artist, on business, and was on his return to the city, walking down the right-hand track, when the train which left here at 9:25 approached, and after the engineer had repeatedly blown his whistle to "down breaks," which were promptly put down, and a series of short whistles blown to alarm him, which he probably failed to hear, (being a little deaf in one ear,) or he had become confused, and before the train was checked the engine had struck him, fracturing the back of his head, and cutting his forehead and breaking one arm and both legs below the knee. The train was stopped within its length, and the conductor and employees of the train went back and found his lifeless body on the side of the road. It was carefully placed in the baggage car and brought to this city. The conductor, Capt. J. Peck Dukehart, immediately reported the fact to Mr. Koontz, the agent, and word was sent to Mr. J.W. Plant, undertaker, who took charge of the remains about 10 1/2 o'clock. Officers Atchison and Lawler took charge of the remains until the arrival of Mr. Plant.

As soon as the facts became known Mr. Patterson, Mr. Samuel Emery, and other friends of the deceased, including one of his sons, arrived, and word was sent to the family, who reside on C street, between 3d and 4 1/2 streets, S.W. The deceased was about 55 years of age and was a man of such sterling qualities as to make him universally respected. He was a prominent member of St. Andrew's Society, the Burns Club, and of Eastern Lodge No. 7 of Odd Fellows. He leaves a wife and five children.

Dr. Potter, the coroner, was called but did not deem it necessary to hold an inquest.

The Evening Star, June 15, 1870

The Funeral of Mr. John Cameron whose death was noticed in yesterday's Star, from being run over by the cars, near Bladensburg, is taking place this afternoon from his late residence, D street south, near 4 1/2 street and is largely attended by his numerous friends. Eastern Lodge, No. 7, Odd Fellows, the St. Andrews Society, and the Burns Club are attending.

The remains are laid out in a handsome walnut coffin, lined with white satin and trimmed with fringe. On the coffin is a silver plate on which is engraved the name of deceased together with date of his birth and death. The coffin is also furnished with several symbols peculiar to the Odd Fellows.

Mr. J.W. Plant is the undertaker, and the coffin will be borne to the Congressional Cemetery on Mr. Plant's elegant white hearse, drawn by four white horses. Pall-bearers will be designated by the several societies of which deceased was a member.

Notes:

April 1851: John Cameron built towers of Trinity Church.

Exhibit in the Forrestal Building (1997):

John Cameron was hired by Renwick, the architect, to take charge of the stone masonry for the building of the Smithsonian Castle. Cameron later built 2 row houses along B street (now Independence) known as Cameron Row. The houses were demolished in 1965 to make way for the Forrestal Building.

Goode, James M., Capital Losses: A Cultural History of Washington's Destroyed Buildings, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C., 1979

Cameron Row - Independence Avenue and 10th Street, S.W., southwest corner
ca. 1848 -- razed 1941

Architect: attributed to John Cameron, Washington, D.C.

When Congress chartered the Smithsonian Institution in August 1846, the first Board of Regents chose one of their number, Congressman

Robert Dale Owen of Indiana (who drafted the charter), to oversee the design and construction of the original Smithsonian Building, commonly known today as "The Castle." Not only did Owen approve New York architect James Renwick, Jr., to design the red sandstone building, but he was also a major influence in selecting the twelfth-century "Norman" style. When construction of the 450-foot-long edifice began in May 1847, Renwick brought down from New York John Cameron, a master stonemason, to oversee the cutting of the stone at nearby Seneca, Maryland, as well as the actual construction. Within a short time, Cameron erected these two Greek Revival row houses immediately behind the Castle both for his residence and as a rental property. The full English basement, handsome columned doorways, plain, classical, stone lintels, and detailed cornice made them a welcome addition to Southwest Washington.

Cameron's work and history remain obscure, but recent investigations have revealed that he carried on extensive construction work in Washington during the 1850s. He was in charge of building Trinity Episcopal Church and the original Scott Hall of the Soldiers' Home--major architectural efforts during the decade preceding the Civil War. Cameron's building techniques were not appreciated in Washington, however, for the roofs of both the Smithsonian Building and the Soldiers' Home collapsed during construction. The Cameron houses remained in a remarkably good state of preservation (the iron steps and oriel window on the east, or left, facade were late nineteenth century additions) until they were razed in 1941 along with more than forty other Victorian houses and churches to widen the south side of Independence Avenue. The site today forms the entrance to L'Enfant Plaza.