

Benjamin Chambers

(- 7 Jan 1871)

Chambers. On the 7th instant, at the advanced age of 82 years, Benjamin Chambers. Mr. Chambers has long been known to the residents of Washington as one of its oldest inhabitants, his residence in this city dating back upwards of fifty-five years.

He was born in the mountain wilds of Ashe county, North Carolina, and was raised in the game region, acquiring his early education under the great disadvantages common to new countries. At a very early age he exhibited evidences of a strong and active mind, characterized by genius and mechanical talent of the highest order, the fruits of which may now be seen in his numerous inventions and improvements in the mechanical arts. When about twenty years of age he left his native place, traveled on foot a distance of over four hundred miles, visited the city of Richmond, Va., and volunteered his services, without pay, in the defence of that city against a threatened attack from the British army. After sojourning for a time in Richmond, Alexandria, Baltimore and Philadelphia, he settled permanently in this city, pursuing the self taught profession of a plate engraver, wherein, for many years he was best known to the people of Washington. He was eminently successful, being largely employed by all the departments of the government, and considered one of the best artists of his day.

The energies of Mr. Chambers were not confined to the business of engraving, his mind being constantly employed in developing useful inventions for the saving of life and labor. Observing the frequency of accidents from premature discharges in firing naval and military salutes, he labored for years in devising means to obviate the danger of such explosions. The result of his labors was a breech-loading banded gun, which, after the abandonment of the breech-loading feature, became widely known as the Parrott gun, and was of inestimable value in field and siege service during the late war.

It is proper to state that Mr. Chambers, when he invented his gun, had no thought of its ever being applied to the destruction of human life; but, on the contrary, was, as before stated, impelled by a desire to avoid the mutilation and death so often attendant upon the firing of salutes.

Another of his remarkable inventions is a means of preventing the counterfeiting of bank notes, which, considered as a work of art and as a result of untiring labor, is an achievement of the highest order.

Besides those named he produced several other inventions and improvements, all worthy results of deep thought and indomitable perseverance.

His walk through life was distinguished by wide benevolence, deep and warm affection for family and friends, an unswerving fidelity to his convictions of right, and the strictest adherence to truth and morality.

During the later years of his life he was afflicted with an incurable malady; his sufferings towards the close being very great, but borne with resignation and fortitude, until finally, surrounded by family and friends, he calmly and peacefully slept the sleep that knows no waking.