

## John T. Chancey

(16 Nov 1830 – 24 Jan 1914)

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*The Evening Star, February 15, 1906, p. 16*

### Fifty Years' Service

#### Testimonial Presented To John T. Chancey



As a token of their appreciation of the fifty years of faithful service rendered by John Thomas Chancey as a special employe of the House of Representatives the members of the House yesterday – this anniversary of the half century of service – presented to Mr. Chancey twenty \$100 gold certificates. Representative Sherman of New York, who made the presentation, assured Mr. Chancey that in the discharge of his duties, he had endeared himself to all the members of the Congresses for fifty long years.

The assembled members cheered when Mr. Chancey took the big roll of crisp notes, and his tone that shook with emotion, while his eyes glistened with tears, endeavored to express his thanks for the gift.

Then followed more applause and cheers and a good deal of handshaking.

Mr. Chancey was born in Charles county, Maryland, and came to Washington when a child. He was first appointed to his present position on a resolution of Thaddeus Stevens. He was later reappointed on a resolution of Alexander H. Stephens, and has since been successively reappointed by resolution.

Mr. Chancey was a prominent member of the old volunteer fire department member of the old volunteer fire department, and was the founder of the Metropolitan hook and ladder company, and foreman of the organization until the inauguration of the paid department. His wife, Mrs. Emily Chancey, and an unmarried daughter, Miss Lillian Chancey, are living to aid Mr. Chancey in celebrating his half century of service.

*The Evening Star, March 10, 1906, p. 22*

Not long ago John T. Chancey acquired fame – and incidentally \$2,000 – for having served continuously as an employe of the House of Representatives for fifty years. He was given the money by members of the House who appreciate his services. In addition to being a House employe for half a century Chancey is mayor of Colonial Beach, a summer resort down the Potomac river. So much about Chancey to explain the story that follows. In the lobby of the House is one of Bierstadt's famous paintings, the landing of Viersons at Monterey in 1601. One of the guides was showing a party through the House wing the other morning, and seeing a number of House members and Chancey standing near, said:

"This famous painting is a picture of Mayor John T. Chancey and his followers landing at Colonial Beach."

The remarks caused a great deal of laughter among the members and spectators.

*The Evening Star, March 14, 1908, part 3, page 5*

### **Fifty-Two Years As Special Employe On House Floor**

John T. Chancey, who has had a longer personal acquaintance with Presidents and national lawmakers than probably any other man in the country, celebrated his fifty-second anniversary of service as special employe of the House floor last week.

Mr. Chancey to the crowds of daily visitors to the Capitol is, next to Speaker Cannon, one of the most useful and best-known men in Congress.

For more than half a century he has sat at the left hand of every Speaker, beginning with the Buchanan administration. While he admits to seventy-eight years of active life, Mr. Chancey, like Uncle Joe Cannon, is one of the young old men in Congress. It may be said to his credit that he does not look a day over fifty.

Two years ago he celebrated his golden wedding anniversary. When visitors to the Capitol who make his acquaintance express surprise at his remarkable health and activity for a man of his age, he merely smiles and says, "I will introduce you to the lady who has taken good care of me for more than half a century." Mrs. Chancey is a bright little woman a few years younger than her husband, a remarkably young looking woman for her age.

"My first recollection of our Presidents," said Mr. Chancey, "was that of Andrew Jackson. While I was only five years old, I remember it well. My family had just moved to Washington from Maryland. The earliest recollection of our life here was the presentation to President Jackson of an immense cheese by the residents. This was, I suppose, regarded in the light that a loving cup or some similar gift would be today. I remember well the people had set apart what they called milking day. There were farms all about the White House then. With the huge contribution from the residents, they made this enormous cheese and presented it to the President, who, I dare say, duly appreciated it, for such a present was considered a pretty good thing in those days."

Mr. Chancey's first work in serving the government was to help organize Washington's first fire company. For some years he was head of the Volunteer Fire Company. While engaged in this work he spent two days and two nights fighting a stubborn fire which almost completely destroyed the Library of Congress and threatened destruction to the Capitol.

"In this work," said Mr. Chancey, recalling his experiences with the early fire fighters of the District, "I remember I often came home in the winter with icicles hanging all over me, but I seldom had a cold. I have been most fortunate in having good health all my life.

"Since I have been at the Capitol," said Mr. Chancey, speaking of his work there as though it covered a few months instead of many years, "I had a four weeks illness, and I have had but very few sick leaves--an occasional day or so, now and then."

When asked to what he attributed his prolonged youthfulness of health he smiled like a teacher might smile at a child's foolish question. "I cannot say that I attribute it to anything in particular," he said. "I have no recipe for good health to offer unless it is plenty of sleep, plenty of wholesome food -- I never went in for dieting or any other sort of fads -- plenty of water to drink -- I never drank much of anything else -- plenty of work to keep busy and forget about yourself -- think of others."

Mr. Chancey plays the part of congressional chauffeur to the new members. This role is included in his numerous duties. "I suppose you might call me general utility man," he said when asked to define the varied services he has performed during the 17,000 days he has spent at the Capitol, when his annual vacations of one month each and Sundays are taken out of his working record.

With each new incoming lot of congressmen, Mr. Chancey has taken pains to escort them about and familiarize them with their new surroundings at the Capitol, which is no small task, as many representatives find for the first time after they once enter upon their duties.

And there are a thousand and one things to be done that the public does not think of in connection with the business of lawmaking that falls to Mr. Chancey's lot to attend to.

Mr. Chancey is chief protector of the two big gold clocks, one over the Speaker's desk and the other which hangs opposite the floor of the House.

"I remember one time by turning back the clock we saved a minister his yearly salary," said Mr. Chancey. "The minister was the Rev. Mr. Boynton, father of Gen. Boynton, chaplain of the House at that time, which was many years ago. Congress was about to adjourn when it was remembered that the chaplain's salary was included in a bill not yet passed, so I hurried over to the clock and turned it back ten minutes to permit sufficient time to get this through. This form of proceedings was necessary in those days and if it had not been done then it would have had to wait perhaps another entire year.

"One time the clock was turned back to consider some phase of legislation which Ben Butler was bitterly opposed to. 'Mr. Speaker,' he said, rising. 'I should like to call attention to the clock,' pointing to the big timepiece. 'It seems to be running backward instead of forward.'

"For two days and two nights during a session of Congress many years ago I got no sleep. There were two successive night sessions. Business was not conducted with the facility it is now since the Reed rules went into effect. Prior to this time, during an exciting session, the House was a perfect bedlam of confusion.

A few years before I went to the Capitol there was a famous place just across the border line in Maryland, called the dueling ground, where men of those days went to settle their difficulties. Dueling was not allowed in the District, and they went across to this Maryland place selected especially for this purpose. I don't mean, of course, Congressmen, when I say they. However, there were two representatives that got into a heated argument on the House floor. This was before I went to the Capitol, but I remember it well. One of the men was FRoger Pryor. I think he was from the south. The other was John Potter of Wisconsin. Pryor challenged Potter to a duel, which was accepted. But instead of naming the dueling grounds and pistols. Potter, who was given this privilege of choosing, named a little room about ten feet square, and bowie knives for weapons. When Pryor heard of this he changed his mind and absolutely refused to have anything to do with the affair he had previously suggested. I think that is the last time I heard of any reference to duels."

Mr. Chancey is a staunch admirer of ex-President Hayes and ex-President Grant.

"Gen. Grant was a fine man," said Mr. Chancey. "He was very fond of children and they all loved him. Society was not scattered then as it is now in the northwest part of town. Then the neighborhoods were more compact and the people had closer acquaintanceships than they have now, since the city was grown so much larger. All the children of the neighborhood knew Gen. Grant. Whenever he passed them walking he would stop and speak to them, sometimes chatting with them for several minutes. Often I have seen him pick up a little child he was particularly fond of and kiss him. The children used to make it a daily habit to watch for him and greet him. He was one of the most popular Presidents with the younger generation, as well as the older.

"Arthur was the most dignified of all the Presidents I knew, and Hayes was one of the most democratic in his manner.

"Daniel Webster was an impressive-looking statesman, with his big head, his long coat and big brass buttons.

"Ben Butler was a splendid man, and I was very fond of him. There were lots of brainy men in those days, but they did not dress so well and make the well-groomed appearance that the congressmen do today."

Mr. Chancey has attended nearly all of the New Year receptions at the White House in the last half century and all the funerals of the notable men who have died in Washington or lain in state here, among them Lincoln, Garfield, Henry Clay, William Henry Harrison, Zachary Taylor and many others.

"Garfield was a fine man," said Mr. Chancey, "and I was very fond of Benjamin Harrison. Mr. McKinley was a quiet man, but a lovable one, and knowing him as I did, or knowing of his fine character as I did, I admired him exceedingly."

Mr. Chancey arrives at the Capitol every day between 9 and 10 o'clock, and he seldom leaves before 6. When he enjoys his vacations he follows President Roosevelt's out-of-door habit, although the exercise he takes is tame in comparison. For Mr. Chancey's chief pleasure is playing croquet with the young folks and children.

Mr. Chancey has only one child, a charming young woman, who makes a gracious hostess and helps to entertain the scores of friends who call upon her father, for he is a most popular man, particularly among the established Washington people who have known him for years.

**Chancey.** On Saturday morning, January 24, 1914 at 9:40 o'clock at his residence, 465 M street northwest, John T. Chancey, beloved husband of Emily Chancey, in the 84th year of his age. Funeral from his late residence, Monday, January 26 at 2:30 p.m. Relatives and friends are invited to attend.

**Chancey.** Members of the Association of the Oldest Inhabitants, District of Columbia, are respectfully invited to attend funeral services of our late associate and vice president, John T. Chancey at his late residence, 465 street northwest, Monday, January 26, at 2:30 p.m.

Theodore W. Noyes, President

Benjamin W. Reis, Recording Secretary

**Chancey.** The National Fraternity of Pages invite all ex-pages residing in Washington to attend with them the funeral of the late Capt. John Chancey from his late residence, 465 M street northwest, Monday at 2 o'clock sharp E.L. Phillips, President, M.D. Crowley, Secretary

*The Evening Star, January 24, 1914, p. 2*

**Capt. John T. Chancey, House Official Dead  
Had Been on Duty at Capitol Building for Fifty-Nine Years  
Unusual Tribute to His Memory  
House Committee to Attend His Funeral Monday**

Capt. John T. Chancey, special employe under the doorkeeper of the House of Representatives, where he had been on duty for fifty nine years, died today at his home, 465 M street northwest, in the eighty-fourth year of his age. Death was due to a general breakdown. He had been failing since October 15, when, for the first time in his long service, he had been forced to remain away from his post.

Funeral services are to be held at his late residence Monday afternoon at 2:30 o'clock, Rev. John T. Huddle officiating. Interment will be in Congressional cemetery.

Capt. Chancey was a member of Federal Lodge, F.A.A.M., a vice president of the Association of Oldest Inhabitants, a member of Washington Lodge, I.O.O.F.; Columbian Encampment, I.O.O.F., and of Farragut Post, G.A.R.

*Universally Popular*

The news of his death was received by members and employes of the House today with great regret, as he was loved by everyone who knew him. He had the record for the longest service at the Capitol. As he had close personal acquaintance with each of the present leaders of the House, as well as the leaders of former days, the expressions of sorrow for his death were numerous and sincere. Speaker Clark, Representative Underwood, Representative Mann and others today testified to Capt.

Chancey's faithfulness as a House employe as well as to his extremely interesting character and personality.

Rev. Henry W. Couden, chaplain of the House, remembered Capt. Chancey in the opening prayer and Representative Austin of Tennessee presented a resolution reciting his years of service and regretting his death.

What is understood to be an unprecedented honor will be paid to Capt. Chancey's memory by the House of Representatives. By the terms of a resolution introduced by Representative Austin of Tennessee Speaker Clark will appoint a committee of seven members of the House, to attend the funeral, which will be held early next week. Older members of the House say that they do not believe that ever before in the history of the United States a Congress has appointed a committee to attend the funeral of an employe.

He was one of the few government employes mentioned by name in the legislative, executive and judicial appropriation bill. For many years past these bills have been signed by Presidents with a separate paragraph carrying his name, as distinguished from the ordinary legislative practice of providing money for a position alone.

#### *Held in Office by Statute*

In other words, the United States government held Capt. Chancey's position for him by a federal statute, and nothing could get it away from him. As an instance of the high esteem in which he was held, it was recalled today that on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of his employment in the Capitol the House passed resolutions congratulating him and voted him a present of \$2,000.

He was known personally to several of the Presidents, especially President Grant and President Taft. He had intimate relations with the White House during the Grant administration, and was fond of telling of a conversation he had with the President in the White House at one time when he was doing some work there for Frederick Grant. Whenever President Taft would see Capt. Chancey, he would ask:

"Well, how is the flag today?"

This inquiry arose from a special duty which the old employe had assigned to him for years. The flag over the House of Representatives which is hauled to the top of the staff at the opening of the daily sessions, and lowered at the end of the day, was a special charge of Capt. Chancey, who took great pride in seeing that the drop of the gavel never found him absent from the halcyons. Of recent years, however, he relinquished the task for one of the younger employes. The valuable historic flag over the Speaker's desk had been in his charge for years.

#### *His Memory for Names*

He had a remarkable memory for the names and faces of congressmen and he had so impressed himself on them that they rarely revisited the Capitol without looking for him. A remarkable instance of this was seen once when Roger Pryor, a member of the civil war congressional days, and a former justice of the United States Supreme Court, called at the House. The two men talked for a long time over sessions of the early sixties.

In accordance with long standing custom, the House will vote to the members of his family an amount equal to what his salary would be for six months and an extra \$250.

#### *Born in Maryland*

Born in Charles county, Md., November 16, 1830, he was brought to this city by his parents when five years old. He resided here ever since. Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia had Capt. Chancey's name inserted in the appropriation bill fifty-nine years ago.

He was a member of the old Northern Liberty Fire Company. When a fire at the home of Senator Benton proved the necessity of a hook and ladder company Capt. Chancey and others organized the Metropolitan Hook and Ladder Company.

#### *In the Military Service*

That company, almost to a man, went into military service during the civil war as the Metropolitan Rifles, under Capt. W.H. Nalley. When on May 22, 1861, the advance was made into Virginia, the company, under command of then Lieut. Chancey, and acting on orders of Col. Stone, marched to the Arlington House, of which they took possession.

His wife, Mrs. Emily Chancey; a daughter, Miss Lillie E. Chancey, and a sister, Mrs. Emily F. Harper, survive him.

*The Evening Star, January 26, 1914, p. 10*

#### **Funeral of Capt. Chancey**

##### **Committee of House Attends Services for Veteran Employee**

Funeral services for Capt. John T. Chancey, an employe of the House of Representatives for more than half a century who died Saturday, were held this afternoon at his late residence, 465 M street northwest. Interment was in Congressional cemetery

The committee named by Speaker Clark to represent the House at the funeral consisted of Richard W. Austin of Tennessee, J. Fred C. Talbott of Maryland, Sereno E. Payne of New York, William A. Jones of Virginia, Richard Bartholdt of Missouri, James Lloyd of Missouri and Michael E. Burke of Wisconsin. A delegation of pages accompanied the funeral procession representing the National Fraternity of Pages, which fraternity Capt. Chancey organized. Many floral tributes were sent