

George Washington Cutter

(- 25 Dec 1865)

The Evening Star, December 27, 1865

Death of Geo. W. Cutter, The Poet

On Christmas day Capt. Geo. W. Cutter, the poet, formerly of Kentucky, died at Providence Hospital, on Capitol Hill, where he was admitted a few weeks since on an order from the Commissioner of Public Buildings. About two weeks since Mr. C. Cammack, Sr., of St. John's Lodge of Masons, of this city, while visiting a brother mason of Georgia at the hospital, found Capt. Cutter at the hospital under treatment, and again on Friday last he saw him, but then he was insensible, at the time being affected with paralysis, and he then was sinking rapidly. He died on Monday, and some of the members of St. John's Lodge, into which he was initiated years ago, this morning attended his funeral from the undertaking establishment of Mr. A. Buchly, on Pennsylvania avenue, where the body was removed after the death and placed in a handsome coffin. His remains were interred with masonic honors in one of the sites of St. John's Lodge in Congressional Cemetery--the burial service being read by Mr. Cammack.

Capt. Cutter was a descendant of a Massachusetts family, and was born in Quebec, Canada. In early life he settled in the West, and practiced law in Kentucky until the breaking out of the war with Mexico, when he raised a company and joined Taylor's army on the Rio Grande. He served with him to the close with distinction. During Taylor's and Fillmore's Administrations he held a clerkship in the Treasury Department.

He figured in the days of "Know Nothingism" as an orator, and took part in the movement. He was a man of considerable ability, and with his pen made quite a reputation, his poem, a "Song of Steam," having wide popularity. At one time he was a strict temperance man, and spoke for the societies here. In his youth he was wedded to a tragic actress of some note, from whom he was afterwards divorced, and he married again in the West. He left here about the close of Mr. Fillmore's Administration, and returned again a few years since, but we believe he has not been in any employment here.

The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography, vol. 22

CUTTER, George Washington, poet, was born in Southern Massachusetts in 1801. While little has been recorded of his forefathers, it is known that he came from a fairly distinguished family, several members of which took an active part in the settlement of Indiana. In his childhood his father moved to Quebec, Canada and later to Indiana. While his early schooling was somewhat limited, he occupied his spare time with reading and studying law. He practiced that profession in Terre Haute, was elected to the state legislature and because of his gift for oratory, became recognized as a brilliant and eloquent public speaker. He was practicing law in Covington, Ky., when the Mexican war was declared. Raising a company of infantrymen, he was commissioned its captain in the 2nd Ky. Volunteers under the command of Col. McKee. He distinguished himself in the battle of Buena Vista by rescuing his regimental commander who had fallen, severely wounded, during a charge. At the close of the war he affiliated himself with the Know-Nothing party, and was an ardent supporter of the cause of temperance. When Zachary Taylor was elected president Cutter's political activities were rewarded by a clerkship in the treasury department, a post he held until the end of Fillmore's administration in 1853. It was while thus employed in Washington that he wrote the verses which attracted considerable attention throughout the nation. His most celebrated poems are "The Song of Steam," "The Song of Lightning," and "E Pluribus Unum." His published books are "Buena Vista and Other Poems" (1848); "Song of Steam and Other Poems" (1857), and "Poems, National and Patriotic" (1857). At the end of his clerkship, he went West to practice law, but returned to Washington in 1865 to accept a special

government commission. He belonged to the Masonic fraternity. He was twice married, his first wife being Mrs. Frances Ann Drake, an actress of Cincinnati, Ohio, whom he divorced. He died in Washington, D.C., Dec. 25, 1865.

The Dictionary of American Biography

CUTTER, GEORGE WASHINGTON (1801-Dec. 25, 1865), poet, was born in Quebec, Canada, of a family which had come there from Massachusetts. His education was not extensive but for a time he studied law and, after a residence at Terre Haute, Ind., during which he served in the lower house of the Indiana legislature, 1838-39 (Complete List of Members, etc., 1903), he practiced in Covington, Ky., until the beginning of the Mexican War stirred his imagination with visions of conquest for his country and of military glory for himself. In 1847 he helped to raise a company of volunteers, which became a part of the 2nd Kentucky Regiment. He was made its captain and joined Taylor's army on the Rio Grande, where he served with distinction until the close of the war. He took part in the battle of Buena Vista during which he helped to carry Col. Clay from a position of danger under the enemy's fire and remained with him until his death. The victory inspired one of his best-known poems, written on the battle-field. At the close of the war he went into politics as a zealous Whig and later became a more or less popular orator in the cause of Know-Nothingism. He was also at one time an earnest advocate and speaker for the temperance cause. Under Taylor's administration he received a clerkship in the Treasury Department at Washington which he held until the close of Fillmore's administration, when he lost it through political changes and left Washington. Early in life he had married Mrs. Frances Ann Drake of Cincinnati, an actress in tragic parts, from whom he was divorced. Later he married again in the West. He published three volumes of verse, *Buena Vista and Other Poems* (1848), *The Song of Steam and Other Poems* (1857), and *Poems, National and Patriotic* (1857)—all vigorous and unconventional in thought, if conventional in metre. *The Song of Steam*, his best work, is suggestive of Kipling's later poetic apotheosis of machinery. A few years before his death Cutter returned to Washington but found no employment. When stricken with paralysis, he was admitted to Providence Hospital on an order from the Commissioner of Public Buildings, and there he died alone. His funeral was conducted by the St. John's Masonic Lodge and he was buried in the lot owned by the Lodge in the Congressional Cemetery.

[Wm. T. Coggeshall, *Poets and Poetry of the West* (1860); J.W. Townsend, Ky. In Am. Letters, 1784-1912 (1913); Rufus W. Griswold, *Poets and Poetry of America* (rev. ed. 1874); Lib. Of Southern Literature, vol. XV (1909); Benj. Cutter, *Hist. Of the Cutter Family of New Eng.* (1871); *New-Eng. Hist. And Geneal. Reg.*, Apr. 1866; *Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), Dec. 27, 1865; *Daily Morning Chronicle* (Washington, D.C.), Dec. 28, 1865.]