

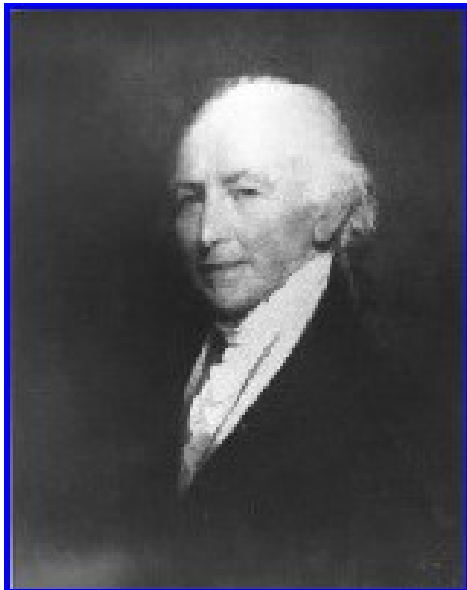
Samuel Allyne Otis

(- 22 Apr 1814)

The National Intelligencer, April 23, 1814

Died. Yesterday in this city, after an illness of four or five days only, Samuel A. Otis, Esquire, late Secretary of the Senate, aged 73. His long and faithful service in many important public offices, and especially in that of Secretary of the Senate, from the first organization of the General Government, to the last day of the last session of the Senate, (during which time he was never absent a single day from the duties of the Senate while in session) entitle him to the grateful remembrance of his country.

His friends and the citizens of the District are invited to attend his funeral this day at 3 o'clock p.m. from his late residence on the Capitol Hill.



Biographical Directory of the United States Congress 1774-1989

A Delegate from Massachusetts; born in Barnstable, Barnstable County, Mass., Nov. 24, 1740; was graduated from Harvard College in 1759; engaged in mercantile pursuits in Boston; member of the State house of representatives in 1776; member of the Board of War in 1776; collector of clothing for the Continental Army in 1777; member of the Massachusetts constitutional convention which framed the constitution of that State; again a member of the State house of representatives 1784-1787 and elected speaker of the house in 1784; Member of the Continental Congress in 1787 and 1788; elected Secretary of the United States Senate on April 8, 1789 and served until his death in Washington, D.C. April 22, 1814; interment in the Congressional Cemetery.

The Hill, April 1, 1998

Samuel A. Otis, First Secretary of the Senate

April 8, 1789

Senate elects a secretary

by Richard A. Baker

In 1789 and for the next 75 years, the Senate compensated this officer at a greater rate than its individual members. It authorized the officer, in certain instances, to preside over the Senate, to administer oaths, and -- in later years -- to supervise employees of deceased or resigned senators.

Early in 1789, as plans went forward for establishing the new Congress, a heated contest developed for the job of secretary of the Senate. The obvious candidate was dapper Charles Thomson, secretary of the soon-to-expire Continental Congress during its 15-year existence. But the self-important Thomson had many enemies. A group of his foes devised a scheme -- disguised as an honor -- to get him out of town during the crucial last-minute maneuvering leading to the secretary's election. Congressional leaders asked Thomson to travel to Virginia to "notify" George Washington of his election and accompany the president-elect back to the capital in New York. With Thomson safely away from the Senate, Vice President-elect John Adams arranged the election of his long-time protege Samuel Otis.

The 48-year-old Otis had been quartermaster of the Continental Army, Speaker of the Massachusetts House, and a member of the previous Congress. Two hundred and nine years ago, on

April 8, 1789, the Senate elected Otis as its chief legislative, financial and administrative officer. On April 30, he had the honor of holding the Bible as George Washington took his presidential oath. Throughout that First Session, which lasted until September, Otis tirelessly engaged the many tasks associated with establishing a new institution. The growing importance of his job was reflected in the number of individuals who tried to take it from him -- including Washington's own secretary. From 1789 to 1814, at a time when half the senators failed to serve out their six-year terms, Otis functioned as the Senate's historical memory. When he died, in 1814, after not missing a single day's work in 25 years, senators deeply lamented his passing.