

Stephen Pleasonton

(1776 – 31 Jan 1855)

Pleasanton. On the evening of January 31, Stephen Pleasanton, Fifth Auditor of the Treasury Department of the United States, in the 79th year of his age, after an illness of ten days. His friends and those of his family are respectfully invited to attend his funeral from his late residence, No. 38e west 21st street, at 12 o'clock on Saturday, to proceed to the Congressional Cemetery.

The National Intelligencer, Monday, February 5, 1855

Solemn Ceremonies

(funeral of Felipe Molina)



On the same day the remains of our late venerable fellow-citizen, Stephen Pleasanton, Esq., were consigned to the tomb, amidst the regrets of numerous friends, and with the respect due to a life of integrity and useful public service.

(funeral of John W. Maury)

Clipping in the Scrapbook of John C. Underwood, page 73

The incumbents of the office (Fifth Auditor) have been the following, viz:

Stephen Pleasanton, of Delaware, appointed March 6, 1817; Josiah Minot, of New Hampshire, March 3, 1855; Murray McConnel, of Illinois, August 1, 1855; Bartholomew Fuller, of North Carolina, March 1, 1859; John C.

Underwood, of Virginia, July 31, 1861; Charles M. Walker, of Indiana, August 31, 1863.

Autobiography of Rear Admiral Charles Wilkes, U.S. Army 1798-1877. Edited by William Morgan, et al. Naval History Division, Dept. of Navy, Washington, 1978

Among the Society there were the Pleasantons. Mr. Pleasanton held the office of 5th Auditor of the Treasury. He was as honest and upright a gentleman as ever served the country, exact in all his business transactions and with much judgement and bonhomie as could be found in very many. He was very often consulted and duly appreciated by the Administration and was intimate with most of the leading men of his day. He was not a bright man, but with his accomplished and handsome wife they had much influence in the intricacies of the Govt. and from her beauty and sprightliness, had great power over the distinguished men by whom the Government was administered and were always well posted of what was going on. Mrs. Pleasanton had been a great belle and retained much of her beauty when we knew her. She had much to say in the various crises through which our Government passed through in the days of Madison, Monroe and Jackson, and had much to say and advice during the Administration of Mr. Adams. She was very clever and witty and with agreeable and kindly manner had an extensive influence over the counsels of the nation. They entertained charmingly at dinners and occasionally had a large party. They had a large family of two sons and four daughters and were very hospitable in the Society. Their domestic circle was charming. One of the daughters was imbecile, I believe the eldest. The second married Col. [John G.] Watmough of Philadelphia, a Member of Congress, and the two remaining

have never married -- both extremely clever, and the youngest extremely handsome when she first grew up and was very interesting and clever. They have always added to the society, and the liveliness of Sarra has always given a charm to the society she moved in from her wit and sprightliness. The Sons -- the Eldest married in Philadelphia a very wealthy girl, and the 2nd Son, Alfred, was educated at West Point and greatly distinguished himself in the Mexican War & the Rebellion. He subsequently quitted the army & after a short time was appointed by Genl. Grant to Assessor of New York. Here he gave great satisfaction and was advanced to the position of Solicitor in the Treasury of Washington. A difficulty arose between him and the Secy. Of the Treasury relative to his duties and he retired by the order of the President, who caused him to be superseded. Mr. & Mrs. Pleasanton died within a short time of each other. Their day had gone by and the onward march of the Country and its extension of business caused the Light Houses which had been under his especial charge to be confided to a board & this department was accordingly taken out of his hands. But all were satisfied that it had been conducted with great economy and zeal for the public Service.

Mr. P. was a very Methodical Man and all his duties were carried on with great punctuality. It was observed that even in his daily walks he appeared to have Studied both time and Method for at any precise moment of each day he was to be seen in almost the same place. He was a very kind hearted Gentleman with much dry humour, but was thought to be not a little nervous and excitable in the intercourse with those under him. He was of the medium height, very erect in his walk and somewhat emaciated. His clothes were worn very loose upon his person. His advancing age unfitted him to contend with the many who sought to dispose him from office, but his well earned reputation and scrupulous performance of his duties rendered his position impregnable and it was not until an Act of Congress was passed that he lost his place and employment in the Govt service which he had served for upwards of forty years. Mrs. Pleasanton has been described to me as very beautiful. When I knew her, she Retained many of the Marks and great vivacity of manner in Conversation. She was exceedingly kind and attentive to us and many was the pleasant hours we passed under her hospitable roof. They lived on the extreme of the West end of the city on 21st & F Street. It was, in fact, almost country and the domicile consisted of a two story double house of Brick with a small garden in front.

Mrs. James Madison, The Incomparable Dolley, by Ethel Stephens Arnett, Piedmont Press, Greensboro, North Carolina, 1972, p. 238

Before the note was received, John Graham, Chief Clerk in the Department of State, and two other clerks, Stephen Pleasanton and Josiah King, had thoughtfully planned to save the valuable public records of the State Department. Under the direction of Pleasanton, enough coarse linen bags had been purchased to hold the papers. Into these containers "The original Declaration of Independence, the articles of confederation, the federal constitution, many treaties and laws as enrolled, General Washington's commission as Commander-in-chief of the army of the Revolution...together with many other papers" had been carefully packed. The bags had been hung around the room so as to be ready at a moment's warning to be moved to a place of safety. Wagons, cart, and vehicles of all kinds were in such great demand for moving army provisions that it was difficult to find any means of transportation for the documents. Pleasanton, however, was a dependable man, and he found conveyances and took the valuable records to a mill about three miles beyond Georgetown, where he concealed them. After this patriotic task was performed, Pleasanton slept that night at the home of the Reverend Mr. Maffitt, about two miles from the mill. During the night Pleasanton remembered that the mill was not far from General Mason's cannon foundry, and since he expected that the British would destroy the foundry, he feared the enemy's close proximity to the mill would endanger the records. The next morning he was able to engage country wagons for transporting the national papers. He removed them from the mill

and, on horseback, he attended them to Leesburg, Virginia, where he deposited them in a vacant stone house, thirty-five miles from Washington.