

John Henry Purviance

(1763 – 6 Nov 1820)

The National Intelligencer, November 7, 1820

Died, yesterday morning, after a long indisposition, John Henry Purviance, Esq. aged 48, of the Department of State, where he had, discharged responsible duties for several years. Mr. P. earlier in life, filled various stations abroad, of a public character, in all of which he invariably acquitted himself with credit, and to the satisfaction of the government. His private virtues and amiable deportment insured the esteem of a large circle of friends here and elsewhere, who will learn his decease with deep regret.

His funeral will take place this afternoon at 3 o'clock, from the house of Mrs. Blake, on Pennsylvania avenue, which his friends are invited to attend without further notice.

John H.B. Latrobe and His Times 1803-1891, by John E. Semmes, The Norman Remington Co., Baltimore, Md., p. 206

As recorded in the diary of John H.B. Latrobe: John Purviance was a prominent practitioner (attorney) in those days, a learned man, a man of precedents, of untiring labor, with no pretensions as a speaker, but so honored for his honest truthfulness as to have collected around him as valuable a clientele as was possessed by any other one of the profession.

Purvines, Stuart Hoyer. *The Purviance Family: A Genealogy with Allied Families*. Privately Printed, 1986.

John Henry Purviance, son of Samuel and Catherine Purviance, never married. He was well educated (presumably in the schools of Europe since no record has been found as to his attending schools in America) and was employed as early as 1794 as secretary and interpreter for the State Department, accompanying James Monroe to France.

That he was associated with the State Department from that time until his death is fairly obvious. Just exactly what this association was, however, is not always clear. While many of his papers, and a number of diaries are maintained in the Purviance Papers by the manuscript department, Duke University, there are not sufficient documents to cover the entire period. That he was a close intimate of many in the foreign service is made clear and he traveled extensively to and from the continent on various missions. There are several memoranda in his handwriting of interviews with Monroe and representative of the French government concerning treaties with the United States as it related to France and to Spain; and negotiations for keeping the Mississippi open to American shipping. A number of Monroe's rough drafts of speeches or letters remain in the collection. Some mystery surround some of the documents. In 1796, at Monroe's request, he compiled a series of memoranda explaining the difficulty in obtaining cash for a draft for \$120,000 sent to Monroe by the U.S. Treasury. While not specifically stated, it would appear that the money was to be paid to Napoleon's brother.

There is correspondence addressed to him from Fowler Skipworth, the American Consul-General at Paris. During 1801 and 1802 he was back in the United States but was exerting every effort to again be sent abroad, apparently for his health. He solicited the support of a number of influential friends in this regard and the State Department records disclose a petition signed by many such in his behalf. He succeeded in this and served as Secretary of Legation in London from 1804 to 1810. There is on file a considerable amount of correspondence between he and Monroe during this period. There are also four letters addressed to him by the American painter, John H.B. Latrobe