

William Winstead Seaton (Jan 1785 – 18 Jun 1866)

The National Intelligencer, January 3, 1850

Smithsonian Institution

Yesterday being the day appointed for the annual meeting of the Regents of the Smithsonian Institution, the Board assembled at 12 o'clock at the Institution Building.



Present: Hon. Millard Fillmore, Chancellor

Hon. Jefferson Davis
Hon. James M. Mason,
Hon. H.W. Hilliard,
Hon. Richard Rush,
Gen. J.G. Totten,
W.W. Seaton

The Secretary, Professor Henry, made, pro forma, a report of the operations of the Institution during the past year.

Mr. Seaton, from the Executive Committee, made in like manner a report of the disbursements of the Institution during the past year, the state of the funds, and a fiscal plan for the ensuing year.

General Totten, from the Building Committee, reported in like manner the progress of the building, and the proceedings of the committee in regard to the buildings and grounds during the past year.

There being two vacancies in the Board, which were expected to be filled in the course of a few days, the Board

transacted no further business than to go through the edifice

Seaton. In this city at 10 o'clock in the morning of June 16, after a long and painful illness, William Winton Seaton, aged 81 years and 5 months. The funeral will take place from his late residence on E street near 7th on Monday the 18th instant at 4-1/2 o'clock when the friends of the family are respectfully invited to attend.

The Evening Star, June 18, 1866

The Late W.W. Seaton

The decease of W.W. Seaton has caused the most profound grief in this community where he was universally known and beloved and expressions of regret reach us from every quarter. The Corporation offices in the City Hall are closed today and the schools are dismissed.

The Evening Star, March 5, 1880

Last of the Old Seaton Mansion

A building permit has been issued by Mr. Entwisle, the inspector of buildings, to Ed. Abner for the construction of a hall and lager beer garden on E between 7th and 8th streets northwest. The site for

this garden is the old Seaton mansion, which is now being torn down. This fine old brick mansion, with wide hall, ample parlors and other apartments, and garden in the rear, has been historic for over half a century as the residence of Ex-Mayor W.W. Seaton, one of the proprietors of the National Intelligencer, and associate editor with Mr. Joseph Gales. It was the resort of all the notable people who visited Washington, and where most generous hospitality was dispensed. It is said that President Harrison, who was the guest of Mr. Seaton, used the northeast chamber of the second story for the preliminary meetings of his Cabinet before his inauguration. Mrs. Seaton superintended the management of the garden, and each of the distinguished persons who were visitors contributed a fruit tree. Mr. Calhoun's pear tree was long noted in city pomology. Mr. Webster sent a New England apple tree, Mr. Clay an apricot tree, Mr. Benton a cherry tree, Mr. Alex. Porter, of La., a fig tree, Silas Wright a plum tree, and other Senators other trees and thus the garden was planted by senatorial hands.

The Evening Star, May 11, 1881

The School Memorial to W.W. Seaton

The Benefit Performance Tomorrow Night

The pupils and ex-pupils of the high school will present the play of Julius Caesar at the National Theater tomorrow (Thursday) night. The process of the performance will be their contribution towards erecting a monument to the late W.W. Seaton, esq., whose name, as a co-editor of the National Intelligencer, mayor of Washington, and prominently a friend of the public schools, is a household word among our older citizens and persons interested in our school system. An entertainment of this or a similar character is the only way in which the young people can testify their interest in the enterprise and they deserve every encouragement for their appreciation of one whose efforts in their behalf antedated their births, and the object forcibly commends itself to our readers. We are informed that the performance will be much better than the average dramatic efforts; that Miss M.K. Schreiner and Mr. Thad. K. Sailer have been untiring in their instruction in the elocutionary and managerial departments; that the amateur orchestra contains superior musical talent, and that the "Lawrence Barrett Dramatic Club" has among its members amateurs of pronounced ability.

Perley's Reminiscences, pp. 56

Colonel William Winstead Seaton, was by trade a printer, and his generous hand was ever ready to aid those of his fellow-craftsmen who were in destitute circumstances--indeed, the superannuated compositors of the 'National Intelligencer' always received "half pay." Coming here when Washington was only just "staked out," he was honorably identified with the growth of Washington City, and his administration as Mayor is favorably spoken of by the citizens of all classes and parties.

Kenton N. Harper, *History of the Grand Lodge and of Freemasonry in the District of Columbia*, 1911
Grand Master, 1822-24

Brother Seaton was born January 11, 1785, at Chelsea, Va., and was a lineal descendant through his father of one of the oldest and most historic families of Scotland, and through his mother of an equally illustrious English family, that of Winston, both of which settled in Virginia in the latter part of the seventeenth century, and were prominently identified with the early history of the Colonies.

His youth was passed at the ancestral home where a domestic tutor directed his education until he reached in Richmond what was then the culminating academic polishing of "Ogilvie, the Scotchman," a pedagogue of great reputation at that period. The great Patrick Henry was a near-relative and frequent

guest at the Virginia home, and very fond of young Seaton, directing his early sports and giving him the rich benefit of his companionship.

At the age of 18 Bro. Seaton's mind was matured, his ambition aroused, his vocation decided, and he passed into the arena of public life, entering with manly earnestness upon the career of political journalism, of which he was one of the country's pioneers. His first essay in the field of politics was as assistant editor of the "Richmond Journal." This was followed in the next few years by editorial work in Petersburg, Va., Raleigh, N.C., and Halifax, N.C. At Raleigh, to which place he returned after a short absence, he became associated with Mr. Joseph Gales in the publication of the "Register," and in 1809 became united in marriage with Miss Sarah Gales, sister of the above-named. In 1812 the firm of Gales & Seaton acquired "The National Intelligencer and Washington Advertiser," which had lately been founded, and Bro. Seaton entered upon what proved to be his life work, his journal proving at once a financial success and for many years a powerful factor in the national political world.

During the War of 1812 Bro. Seaton and his partner were both enrolled in the military service and were stationed for some time at Fort Warburton, the present site of Fort Washington, and was with his command when it met the British at Bladensburg, August 24, 1814, and took a conspicuous part in the sharp engaged that ensued. In Admiral Cockburn's passage through the city he caused the "Intelligencer" office to be sacked and all the property, books, and papers to be burned.

An intimate of Jefferson, Marshall, Aaron Burr, Patrick Henry, LaFayette, Daniel Webster, and practically all the prominent men of the country during his adult life, his prolonged career was interwoven with the social and political annals of Washington.

While his great intellect was directed toward the shaping of the national policies of his day he was yet an active and valued citizen of his adopted city, and served as Mayor from 1840 to 1850, having previously twice declined the honor.

He was an ardent worker in the cause of education and was untiring in his efforts to improve local school conditions.

In religion he was Unitarian and was one of the founders of that church in Washington. He was also one of the founders of the Washington Monument Association and its first vice-president.

While the great novelist, Charles Dickens, was in this country he was entertained by Bro. Seaton, and in the raciness and charm of manner, in the genial goodness stamped on every lineament of his countenance this keen reader must have seen the lovable man, and the immortal Cherryble Brothers might seem to have been inspired by the subject of this sketch and his partner, so nearly akin in every gentle characteristic.

His genial cordiality, his captivating courtesy, his large hospitality and readiness of beneficence had few equals, and won the individual affection of all with whom he came in contact. These qualities, united with his great personal charm, his full intelligence and the seal of distinction with which nature had stamped him, marked him out from his fellow-men, and it was but natural that on all civic public occasions, whether it was an address of welcome to an incoming President or to speed a parting one, to inaugurate benevolent institutions or to assume the more delicate and gracious task of presiding at social festivals, that he should be called upon, and thus upon the occasion of the sojourn of Lafayette to this country, the special charge of the nation's guest seemed by tacit consent to devolve upon Bro. Seaton, and how well he discharged this duty is testified by the life-long friendship then formed with our distinguished French ally.

Through an unfortunate combination of circumstances growing out of the war, the "Intelligencer" lost ground, and on December 31, 1864, Bro. Seaton retired from active connection therewith, after an unprecedented term of service of 52 years. His great generosity, however, had interfered with his accumulating a competence in that time, and in his own words he retired "with nothing."

For 20 years, Bro. Seaton gave unsparingly of his time and talents for the upbuilding of symbolic Masonry in this jurisdiction, and, falling as this activity did, within the most trying period in the history of

the Fraternity, the value of his services cannot be too highly rated. While his original lodge is not a matter of available record his connection with the local Craft began with his affiliation with Lebanon Lodge, No. 7, January 20, 1815. He was elected Senior Warden the following year, and served as Master, 1818 to 1821, and again from 1825 to 1827. During the interim between these terms he served as Grand Master for 1822, 1823, and 1824. He withdrew from active participation in Masonic affairs in 1836.

It is worthy of note that his son, Malcolm Seaton, also served as Grand Master of this jurisdiction in 1902.

At the patriarchal age of 81, after several years of severe suffering, which he bore with patience and fortitude, he passed away June 16, 1866.

"And thus," in the language of one of his biographers, "undimmed by a single unworthy act, in every word and thought of his spotless life a true gentleman, duty his watchword, exalted honor his instinct, Christianity his guide, William Winston Seaton bore his historic name untarnished to the grave; nobly illustrating the legend of his family arms; 'In via virtuti via nulla.'"