

The First Mayors of Washington, D.C.

(see Map at end)

In 1790 Congress passed “An Act for Establishing the Temporary and Permanent Seat of the Government of the United States” (“Residence Act”). The Act, among other things, authorized President Washington to select the permanent site of the United States government and to appoint three Board of Commissioners responsible for preparing the new federal city for the



William Thornton, by Gilbert Stuart, 1804

reception of the Government in 1800. President Washington appointed the first three commissioners in 1791. In 1794 he appointed **Dr. William Thornton [R33/40]** to replace a commissioner who had resigned, and in 1800 he appointed **William Cranch [R45/205]** as another replacement. Both served until an Act of Congress in 1802 abolished the Board of Commissioners and authorized the President to appoint the City’s mayors to a term of one year.



Judge Wm. Cranch

1st -- Robert Brent (1802–1812), the first appointed mayor is buried at St. Johns Church, Forest Glen, Md.

2nd -- Daniel Rapine (1812-1813) [R54/6], the first elected mayor, was born in Philadelphia in 1768. He was by trade a publisher and bookseller. He moved to Washington in 1800 shortly before the government relocated from Philadelphia. He established his bookstore and residence at the southwest corner of New Jersey Avenue and B Street, S.E. -- the first house built south of the Capitol and now site of the House of Representatives Rayburn building.

An ad appearing in the *National Intelligencer* in 1800 provides a glimpse at the type of books that his customers were reading.

Before his election as Mayor, Daniel Rapine served on the 2nd, 3rd, and 7th City Councils. He was then appointed Mayor by President Madison to serve out the term of Robert Brent who had resigned. In May 1812 the office of Mayor became, by Act of Congress, an elective office (though not yet by general election). Daniel Rapine was elected by the City Council in June 1812, and he served one term at a salary of \$400 per year.

The most notable event during Rapine’s term in office was the declaration of war against Great Britain. The most significant act passed during his term appropriated money for the defense of

WASHINGTON BOOK-STORE.
RAPINE, CONRAD, & CO.
Corner of South B. Street and New Jersey Avenue, near the Capitol.

HAVE just received, and for sale at the above store, Letters from Alexander Hamilton, concerning the public conduct and character of John Adams, Esq. President of the United States

Also, just opening, a choice assortment of books in History, Law, Medicine, Divinity, Arts and Sciences, Classics, School books, Novels, Romances Biography, &c &c.—With a good assortment of super royal, royal, medium, demy, and foolscap writing paper, thick and thin post, blue & common wrapping paper, best Dutch quills, wafers, sealing wax, ink powder, red and black ink, black lead pencils parchment, playing cards, blank books, &c. &c.—All which they will dispose of at the very lowest prices.

Public officers and others, who will please to favour them with their custom, may rely on having the strictest attention paid to their orders.

Nov. 17th, 1800.

the city. That money would be much needed when the British invaded and burned the city in August 1814. Two other notable acts during his term authorized lotteries to raise money to build two schools and provide for sinking wells, installing pumps and pipes for conveying water, and erecting hydrants.

Following his term as Mayor, Rapine returned to the printing and publishing business and on January 23, 1817 announced publication of the 7th and 8th volumes of **William Cranch's [R45/205]** reports of cases argued before the Supreme Court. He ended his days as Postmaster of the House of Representatives.

Rapine died of “a long and lingering illness” on Thursday, May 11, 1826 at the age of 58. He is buried next to his widow who died April 4, 1835, and 3 daughters and a son-in-law. **All of the sites are unmarked.**

3rd -- Dr. James H. Blake (1813-1817) is buried at Oak Hill Cemetery.

4th -- Benjamin Grayson Orr (1817-1819) [R28/15] is thought to have been born in Virginia, and he later married Elizabeth Flood also of Virginia. He owned a store on Jefferson Street in Georgetown that sold groceries and liquor, and he was a large investor in real estate. From 1813 he was a contractor providing supplies to the army in Ohio and the Territory of Michigan.



Orr was elected Alderman in 1812 but resigned in 1813. He was elected the fourth mayor in 1817 by the City Council and served 2 terms during the presidency of James Monroe. His residence was at the N.W. corner of 8th Street and Market Space N.W.

During his terms he was very active in procuring public improvements such as grading of the streets. Orr repealed laws allowing public markets to open on Sunday to the consternation of most housewives. He was, however, instrumental in establishing Washington's first volunteer fire companies. He appropriated \$1,000 for the purchase of four fire bells and procured apparatus for the companies. One of his final acts was to authorize a lottery to raise funds to build a city hall and penitentiary.

Benjamin Orr died on Wed. April 10, 1822 at the age of 59 “of a lingering and painful illness, the closing scene of which was fortunately peaceful and composed”. Mrs. Orr died February 16, 1827. Both are interred in Congressional Cemetery; **their graves are unmarked**. They had no children.

5th -- Samuel N. Smallwood (1819-1822) [R49/26] was born in Charles County, Md. and arrived in Washington in 1795. He took the position of overseer of the slaves at the Capitol construction site earning \$15 a month. By the time of his death he was a leading dealer in lumber and building supplies and owned one of the main wharves of the City, Smallwood's Wharf. He lived at the corner of 2nd & N St., S.E., now part of a housing development just southeast of the Waterside Mall. His residence was located near his wharf on the “Eastern Branch” (the Anacostia).

Smallwood entered public life in 1804 when he was elected to the 3rd Council as Alderman (serving with Daniel Rapine). He was reelected in 1806 and 1809-1811. Smallwood was first elected Mayor by the City Council in 1819. In 1820 Congress amended the city charter to provide that the Mayor be elected by popular vote to a term of 2 years. Smallwood was the first to be so elected. He lost the election of 1822 to Thomas Carberry, but was reelected Mayor in 1824. His term was cut short when he died Sept. 30, 1824 at the age of 52. His last act (signed Aug. 24, 1824) created the committee to make arrangements to receive and entertain General Lafayette, the French hero who served in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. Members of the committee included **Maj. Genl. Brown [R57/150-152]**, **Commodore Tingey [R57/1]**, Daniel Carroll, **Richard Bland Lee [R28/24]**, and **George Watterston [Hamilton & Watterston vault]**.

During Smallwood's term plans were adopted for a City Hall as designed by **George Hadfield [R30/33]**, a close friend of Smallwood. Hadfield is also believed to have designed the monument at the Smallwood family plot.

Smallwood was also one of the founders of the Congressional Cemetery and signed the article incorporating the cemetery on April 4, 1807. From 1823 to 1824 he served, together with **Commodore Tingey**, on a committee which approached Congress for funds to build a brick wall to enclose the cemetery. Their efforts resulted in an appropriation of \$2,000 and the first brick wall was erected in 1824.

Smallwood, his wife, eight infant children and two infant grandchildren are buried in the family plot in Congressional Cemetery.

6th -- Thomas Carberry (1822-1824) is buried at Mt. Olivet Cemetery.

7th -- Samuel N. Smallwood (1824) [R49/26] (See 5th Mayor).

8th -- Gen. Roger Chew Weightman (1824-1827) [R53/134] was born in Alexandria, Va., January 18, 1787. His parents had arrived from England shortly before his birth. He took the middle name of Chew from his mother's family name.

Weightman came to Washington in 1800 when the government moved from Philadelphia. He was trained as a printer and first found a position with Way & Groff. He became an assistant to William Duane and bought Duane's firm in 1807. In 1811 he bought a bookstore on F Street and discontinued his printing and publishing business. On May 7, 1814 he married Serena Hanson a daughter of a prominent Maryland and Washington family of Revolutionary War fame.

Before being elected Mayor, Weightman was elected to the 10th council (1812), 11th, 12th, 18th (1820), 19th, 20th and 21st. He was on the committee in charge of the inauguration of **John Quincy Adams** [cenotaph R54/101-103].

Weightman was a First Lieutenant in D.C.'s Light Horse Calvary in the War of 1812 and fought at the Battle of Bladensburg on August 23, 1814 in the vain attempt to keep the British from invading Washington.

In 1824, he was elected by the City Council to fill out the term of Smallwood and was elected by popular vote to a second term in 1826. In the same year, he served as chairman of the committee of arrangements for the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Others on the committee included **Joseph Gales** [R55/158] and **Richard Bland Lee** [R28/24].



When Thomas Jefferson died on July 4, 1826 and John Adams on July 7, 1826, Weightman again headed the committee of arrangements for memorial services for both ex-Presidents. The committee invited Attorney General **William Wirt** [R50/169] to deliver the memorial address.

In 1827 Weightman resigned as Mayor to attend to his responsibilities as Cashier of the Bank of Washington -- a position that he held until 1834. In 1850 he again ran for Mayor but was defeated. From 1851 to 1853 he was Chief Clerk at the Patent Office. A change in administrations resulted in his being reduced to the position of librarian which he retained until 1870.

Until later in life, Weightman was a wealthy and prominent member of Washington society. He served on committees for major celebrations and inaugurations as well as major cultural institutions. He was on the board of the Columbian Institute, the Washington National Monument Society, and, together with **John P. Ingle** [R50/128] (also a prominent figure in the history of the cemetery) and others was a commissioner for the building of City Hall. He was a Justice of the Peace from 1827-1837 and chairman of a citizens committee to lobby for construction of the C&O canal. He had been a Mason since 1811, serving as a Senior Warden in the Lebanon Lodge and Grand Master in the Grand Lodge. In 1860 President Buchanan appointed him Major General of the Militia of the District of Columbia.

At the end of his life Weightman's philanthropy had left him in straitened circumstances. He died February 2, 1876 at 717-1/2 20th Street. Services were held at the Masonic Temple with

burial at Congressional Cemetery. His funeral was attended by many prominent members of society as well as many grateful beneficiaries of his generosity. His wife, Louisa Serena Hanson Weightman died in 1840. She and many of Weightman's family rest in the family plot. **There is no marker at their gravesites.**

9th -- Joseph Gales Jr. (1827-1830) [R55/158] was born at Eckington, near Sheffield, England, April 10, 1786. His father, a printer and publisher, supported the revolutionary ideas of Thomas Payne and left England in 1794 to avoid political persecution. The family moved to a city near Hamburg, Germany, then to Philadelphia in 1795, and finally to Raleigh, NC in 1799 where Gales, Sr. became the proprietor of the *Raleigh Register* and *North Carolina Gazette*. Joseph Gales, Jr. was educated at the University of North Carolina.



On Oct. 14, 1800, Samuel Harrison Smith established the *National Intelligencer* as a tri-weekly journal in Washington, D.C. Years earlier, Gales Sr. had sold the *Universal Gazette* to Smith while still a resident of Philadelphia. In 1807 he introduced his son to Smith who promptly hired Joseph Gales Jr.

In 1810, Smith made Gales the sole proprietor of the *National Intelligencer* and also sold him the *Universal Gazette*. In 1812, Gales welcomed William W. Seaton, his brother-in-law, as a partner in the business. Under Gales and Seaton, the *National Intelligencer* became one of the country's leading newspapers, supporting Whig and unionist causes. Until its demise in 1867 it was considered the epitome of ethical, dignified, and conservative

journalism.

On Dec. 14, 1813, Gales married Sarah Juliana Maria Lee, the daughter of **Theodoric Lee [R56/62]**, who was the brother of **Richard Bland Lee [R28/24]** and of Henry "Light Horse Harry" Lee, thus making Gales a cousin of Gen. Robert E. Lee. Gales built a mansion on a tract on the Brentwood Road and North Capitol and named it 'Eckington' after his birthplace. Throughout his life, Gales associated with the elite of Washington's social, political and diplomatic circles and entertained most of them at his estate.

Gales and Seaton, his brother-in-law, were lifelong friends and joined the volunteer DC militia together immediately after war was declared against Great Britain. They were both privates stationed at Fort Warburton (now Fort Washington). Seaton saw active duty at the Battle of Bladensburg, but Gales was escorting both of their wives to safety in Raleigh. During the invasion of Washington, the *National Intelligencer* printing presses were destroyed by the British in retaliation for the paper's support of the war against Britain and its anti-British sentiments. They, after all, considered Gales a traitor as he had been born in England.

Joseph Gales, Jr. entered public service in 1814 when he was elected Alderman. In 1827 he was elected by the City Council to fill out the term of Mayor Roger Weightman. In 1828 he was the first mayor to be elected by popular vote. He was an ardent supporter of the proposed C&O Canal, and, on July 4, 1828, he participated in the ground breaking ceremony.

Gales was renowned for his generosity. In 1810 he served as President of the Washington Humane Society and in 1812 as Vice President of the Washington Benevolent Society (both charities for the poor). In spite of her constant criticism of "Josy", Gales supported **Anne Royall [R26/194]**, not only during her trial as a "common scold" but also during frequent periods of financial insolvency. At one point he provided her with paper to print her journal *The Huntress* and at another gave her \$5 (the last bill in his pocket) to buy a warm pair of shoes. As mayor he organized ward committees to solicit funds to relieve the poor during the winter season.

Gales was also a lover of animals and especially of dogs. During his later years, his constant companion was "a stately mastiff of the first magnitude, with noble features and wavy ears". His dog accompanied him to work and was popular with his employees as well as with the public. The dog was frequently observed carrying mail to and from the post office.

Gales died July 21, 1860. President Buchanan was among the mourners as were many other dignitaries. Schools were closed for the day and businesses closed early to mark his passing. The impressive obelisk at his gravesite was placed by "representatives of the American press in Philadelphia, New York and Boston". The inscription reads: "For more than half a century the leading editor of the *National Intelligencer* - a journalist of highest integrity, ability and accomplishment."

In the family plot are buried his mother, Winfred Gales, who died in 1829; his wife, Sarah; and his adopted daughter, Juliana Walker Gales. His father, Gales Sr., is buried in Raleigh, N.C.

10th -- John P. Van Ness (1830-1834) is buried at Oak Hill Cemetery.

11th -- William A. Bradley (1834-1836) is buried at Glenwood Cemetery.

12th -- Peter Force (1836-1840) is buried at Rock Creek Cemetery. His wife and 4 children were originally interred in Congressional Cemetery but were removed to Rock Creek when Mayor Force died in 1868.

13th -- Col. William W. Seaton (1840-1850) [R57/165] was born Jan. 11, 1785 at Chelsea, King William County, VA. His great grandfather emigrated from Scotland making Seaton a fourth-generation American. In his youth, he was referred to as the "most elegant young man in Virginia."

Seaton learned the art of printing and chose journalism as a profession. At 18 he was an assistant editor of the *Richmond Enquirer*, and later a manager of the *Petersburg Republican*. In 1807 he purchased the *North Carolina Journal* at Halifax, NC.

Seaton met Joseph Gales, Jr. when they were both actors in an amateur company in Raleigh. In 1806 he was introduced to Gales Sr. and joined the *Raleigh Register* in 1809. On Mar. 30, 1809 he married Sarah Weston Gales, and in 1812 he joined Gales Jr., his brother-in-law, as co-editor of the *National Intelligencer*.



Throughout his life, Seaton was a major participant in Washington society and politics. In 1822 he acquired property on the south side of E between 7th and 8th Streets where he built his residence. It was here that he entertained General Lafayette in December 1824.

Seaton served on the Board of Alderman from 1819 to 1831 and beginning in 1840 was elected Mayor to five successive terms until he resigned in 1850. He served under five presidents -- Van Buren, Harrison, Tyler, Polk, and Taylor -- and was the chairman of the inaugural committee for Harrison through Taylor.

Weightman – Seaton – Force

Seaton's mayoralty coincided with a period of rapid growth in the city. The number of buildings increased from 2,313 to 6,163, and eleven new churches were built. In office Seaton worked vigorously for public education and a variety of civic improvements. The telegraph and gas lighting was initiated in this period. Washington Gas was founded in 1848 by **Benjamin B. French [R63/228]** and a group of investors. In 1849 the *National Intelligencer* played an active role in convincing Congress to fund the building of water works to bring water to the City from Great Falls.

In office, Seaton worked vigorously for public education and a variety of civic improvements. He was also known as a humanitarian. In 1847 he organized committees to provide aid to the victims of the Irish and Scottish potato famines.

Seaton was an avid hunter and lover of dogs. He kept pointers and his last dog, Ponto, died of old age a few months before Seaton. Ponto's devotion and intelligence made him a local celebrity.

Sarah Weston Gales Seaton died Dec. 23, 1863. William died June 16, 1866 of what is described as skin cancer. He was buried at Congressional Cemetery where both Episcopal and Masonic rites (of the highest rank) were administered. As a token of the city's esteem, corporate offices and schools were closed and flags flew at half mast. **There is no gravestone to mark his site.**

14th -- Walter Lenox (1850 to 1852) is buried at Rock Creek Cemetery. His family including his father Peter (superintendent of construction at the White House during the early 19th century), mother and sister are interred in Ranges 32-33 Site 90-91.

15th -- John Walker Maury (1852 to 1854) [R49/171] was born of Huguenot stock in Caroline County, Virginia, May 15, 1809. His father was headmaster of a distinguished school at Williamsburg and his uncle James was a lifelong friend of Thomas Jefferson and served as Counsel in Liverpool for a time. John Walker Maury moved to Washington in 1826. On Oct. 6, 1831 he married Isabel Foyles. They had 15 children.

Maury immediately became one of the most popular young men of the City. He was elected to the City Council in 1835 at the age of 26. He served continuously as Council-Councilman, Alderman, and then Mayor until 1853, with the exception of 1840 when he declined reelection.

As an indication of the confidence others had in his abilities he, at an early age, succeeded Mayor John P. Van Ness as president of the Bank of the Metropolis -- a position that he held until his death. He, together with William Corcoran, was instrumental in convincing Congress



to authorize funds to establish the Government Hospital for the Insane (St. Elizabeths). The most significant project to get underway during his term of office was that of the construction of the public water works from Great Falls to the city. A system that still supplies water to the Capital.

As with many of the other mayors he was a philanthropist. One of his most memorable and lasting gifts was to Clark Mills. When money was not forthcoming to continue work on the bronze statue of Andrew Jackson, now located in Lafayette Park, Maury provide Mills with the money (later repaid) needed to finish the work.

Maury was a life long friend of **John C. Rives [Rives Vault]**, co-editor of the *Globe*, and Mayor Peter Force. He died in 1855 at the age of 46. One of his doctors at the time of his death was

James C. Hall [R45/169]. His funeral was held at Trinity Episcopal and was attended by President Pierce. His son, William, remembered the mournful funeral procession led by Maury's still young wife and their 12 surviving children.

16th -- John Thomas Towers (1854-1856) [R47/165] was born in Alexandria, Va., Feb. 21, 1811. His father was a recent immigrant having arrived in Alexandria from Bingham, England in 1792. John married Susan Burrows Bailey on ???.



Towers joined the Columbia Typographical Society in 1834. He was proprietor of a book and job printing office which occupied several locations. In 1852 he was appointed the first superintendent of public printing in the Capitol. He was also proprietor of the *Whig Standard*, a journal endorsed by Gales and Seaton.

Towers was elected to the Common Councils and served from 1842-1846. He served as Alderman from 1846 to 1854. During this period he developed plans for the creation of the infirmary and workhouse on the Marine reservation located on the northeast borders of Congressional Cemetery.

When Towers was elected Mayor in 1854 the city had a population of 55,000. Ten hotels accommodated 2,470 guests and 24 schools had an enrollment of 2,000 students which represented only about half of the school-age population.

During the 1850's Washington was moving from a sleepy village controlled by 200-300 of its most prominent landowners to a city with the complex physical needs and political environment that entailed. Towers, like all of the mayors of that period was highly respected, but neither he nor they understood what needed to be done or how to do it. Like his colleagues, Towers considered Washington a national monument and expected Congress to provide funding for public projects. Largely ignored, Washington remained a place of poverty, squalor and violence.

Tower's wife, Susan, died Sept. 26, 1852. He died Tuesday Aug. 11, 1857 at the age of 47 "after a painful illness of several weeks duration". He rests beside his wife only a few steps from his predecessor, John Maury. Tower's brother, **Lemuel (R47/181)**, acquired John's printing firm and ran it until his death in 1899. He is buried in the family plot alongside his brother and several other family members.

17th -- Dr. William B. Magruder (1856-1858) is buried at Oak Hill Cemetery. His wife, **Elizabeth [R45/67]** died in 1847 and is buried in Congressional Cemetery.

-- James G. Berret (1858-1861) [Berrett Vault] was born in Carroll Co., Md. in 1815, the son of a farmer. He became involved in local politics at an early age and in 1836 was elected to the state legislature where he served two terms. He arrived in Washington in 1839 and took a position in the U.S. Treasurer's office. From 1853 to 1856 he served as Postmaster of D.C.

Berret was a strong opponent of the Know-Nothing Party which sought to deny voting rights to all but native-born citizens. In 1858 he ran for mayor as the "Anti-Know-Nothing" candidate against Richard Wallach and was elected by a vote of 3,688 to 3,117. In 1860 he won re-election; this time by only 24 votes.



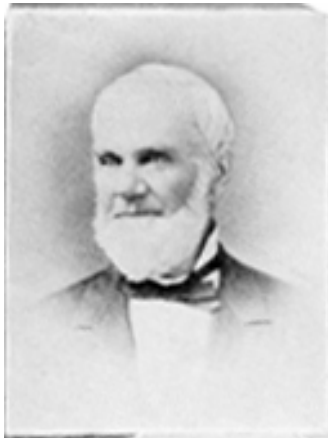
In 1861, when the Civil War broke out, Congress enacted a law requiring all officers of the government, national, state and municipal, to take the oath of allegiance to the United States. Mr. Berret was at the time both mayor of the federal capital and president of the board of police of commissioners. He declined to take the oath on the grounds that he had already subscribed to it when inaugurated as mayor. In consequence he was arrested on August 24, 1861 and taken to Fort Lafayette, N.Y. No evidence could be found of any complicity or sympathy with the Confederacy and he was released in early September. He

returned to Washington but resigned as mayor and his long-time opponent, Wallach, was elected mayor.

He became a close friend of Lincoln who offered him the commissionership of emancipation for D.C. which he declined. Later he accepted President Grant's offer of a position on the board of police commissioners. He remained active in local affairs until his death, and served on the inauguration committees of three Presidents, Buchanan, Lincoln, and Cleveland. James Berret died April 14, 1901 and is interred in the Berret family vault 15 other members of his family.

19th -- Richard Wallach (1861-1868) is buried at Oak Hill Cemetery. His parents, brothers and their families, and his first wife are interred in the Wallach Vault at Congressional Cemetery.

20th -- Sayles Bowen (1868-1870) [R84/102] was born in the Township of Scipio, Cayuga County, New York on Oct. 13, 1813. His parents were from Massachusetts, and were among the first settlers in Cayuga County. He worked on his father's farm and from the age of 17 taught school during the winter months. On July 2, 1835 he married Mary Barker. They had two daughters both of whom died in Washington. Mary died June 3, 1882, and Sayles later married Mrs. Bessie B. Bentley.



From 1838 to 1842 he was employed in the mercantile business. In 1845 he was appointed clerk in the Treasury Department. but was removed for failing to support Lewis Cass to the Presidency and for sending out anti-slavery documents. He supported Van Buren. From 1848 to 1856 prosecuted claims against the government and was very successful. For the next 4 years worked in support of the Republican party. In 1861 after President Lincoln was elected he was appointed Commissioner of Police for the District of Columbia. In the same year he was made disbursing officer of the Senate, and in 1862 he became Collector of Internal Revenue for the District. In March 1863 he was appointed postmaster, a post he held until July 1868, when he was elected mayor.

Bowen was a man of strong liberal convictions. He was very unpopular with white voters at various periods in his public career. He advocated the establishment of schools for "persons of color" and spent \$20,000 of his own money for their support. He was also the friend of the poor and unfortunate of all races, and aided them in every way. The election of 1868 marked the first time blacks could vote in the District, and they strongly supported Bowen, their friend and benefactor. His term was, however, noted for extravagant spending and was deemed a failure.

Sayles Bowen died in Washington on Dec. 16 1896 at the age of 83. He is buried beside his first wife, Mary, and his infant daughters.

21st -- Matthew Gault Emory (1870-1871) is buried at Rock Creek.

----- **The End of the First Mayoral Period** -----

Officially the mayoral period ended as the result of a political process that had become corrupt. Influence-peddling was so rampant that it was felt the D.C. government could not provide the leadership

necessary to manage the growth of the nation's capitol. Racism also played a role. African Americans had been given the vote in 1868 and the city's black population continued to swell following the end of the Civil War as refugees from the south poured in. It was feared the black vote would upset the political balance and result in legislation detrimental to the white population. A large part of the white population eagerly supported the move to establish a Territorial form of government with three commissioners appointed by Congress. The first mayoral period in Washington, D.C. ended at the expiration of Mayor Emory's term, June 1, 1871.

Mayorial Salaries:

1812	\$ 400/yr	1850	\$1,600/yr
1815	\$ 500/yr	1856	\$2,400/yr
1820	\$1,000/yr	1863	\$3,600/yr

Sources:

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*The Association for the Preservation of
Historic Congressional Cemetery
1801 E Street, S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003*

Phone: (202) 543-0539

