

The National Intelligencer

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WASHINGTON: FRIDAY, MAY 8, 1868

DEFERRED LOCAL ITEMS.

The Dedication of the Monument to Benjamin C. Grenup.

The firemen of the city were out in full force Wednesday, for the purpose of assisting in the dedicatory services of the monument to the memory of Benjamin C. Grenup, a member of the Columbia Fire Company, volunteer department, who was killed on the 6th day of May, 1856, while proceeding to a fire. The circumstances attending the death of this young man were as follows: While running with his comrades down the south side of Capitol Hill, he by some means lost his hold of the rope and fell; the heavy "erection" of the Columbia passed over his body, so injuring him that he died within an hour after the accident occurred.

His comrades buried him two days after the night of the sad occurrence, the funeral services taking place at St. Peter's Church, and his remains were placed in the vault at St. Patrick's churchyard, but were subsequently removed to Glenwood, and interred in a lot purchased by the company. The father of the deceased died a few months subsequently, and he was also buried from the engine-house, in the same lot, and the company had the remains of the mother of the deceased, interred in Baltimore, removed and placed beside her son.

The deceased was by trade a granite cutter, and will be collected by many of our citizens as an amateur vocalist of considerable ability, frequently appearing in concerts with Messrs. Matt O'Brien, Andrew Baine, Thomas Stone, Lew. Bennett, Frank Pruitt, and C. W. Hawke. He came here from Baltimore a few years before his death, and, having been a member of the Mechanical Fire Company of that city, he at once identified himself with the fire department here, by uniting with the Columbia Company, No. 1. Mr. Grenup was a young man much beloved by his comrades, and they, to testify their respect for his memory, raised, by voluntary subscription, the amount necessary to erect the beautiful monument over his grave, in Glenwood Cemetery, which was on Wednesday dedicated.

About two o'clock the members of the various fire companies of the city began to assemble in front of the City Hall, and, shortly after, the procession was formed in the following order:

Marine Band, in full uniform; the members of the Columbia Fire Company, in full uniform: red shirts, with white neckties, black pants, black hats. The members of this old and tried organization were out in full force, there being eighty-one men in line. Following the Columbia Company came the Georgetown Fire Department, under command of Chief Engineer William O. Drew. Then came the members of the companies forming the Government Fire Brigade of this city, in charge of Chief Engineer William Dickson. The men of the Government Department were headed by the band of the 4th United States infantry. The fire-engine and hose carriage of the Hibernia Company were also in this portion of the line. Following the Government firemen came the drum corps of the Marine Band, which headed the men of the City Fire Department, who appeared in full uniform, and presented a fine appearance.

The splendid engine of the Columbia Fire Company, drawn by four fine bay horses, closed this portion of the procession. Then followed the truck of the Metropolitan Hook and Ladder Company, drawn by four fine grays; after which came carriages bearing the guests and orators invited by the company to take part in the dedicatory services, among whom we noticed Mayor Wallach, Colonel James A. Tait, Hon. B. B. French, Colonel James B. O'Brien, and Messrs. E. D. Tippet, Simeon Matlock, Colonel A. K. Gardiner, old and highly respected citizens, and once active members of the ancient Columbia. Messrs. Matlock, (aged eighty-three years,) and Tippet, (aged eighty-one years,) are the only members of the original company now living. One of the carriages was occupied by the Board of Fire Commissioners of this city, who were accompanied by Mr. George T. Whittington, of the Alexandria Fire Department. Carriages containing the members of the Boards of Aldermen and Common Council closed the procession, which was in charge of Chief Marshal Thomas H. Robinson.

Mr. J. J. Peabody, the president of the old Columbia Company, was in the line, bearing the beautiful trumpet presented to the company by their patroness, Mrs. E. H. Pendleton. The line of march taken by the procession was: Down Four and-a-half street to Pennsylvania avenue, along Pennsylvania avenue to Seventh street, up Seventh street to New York avenue, and thence to Glenwood Cemetery, where the dedicatory services were to take place.

At the cemetery a platform had been erected just in front of the monument, which is a beautiful structure. The monument is erected over the graves of the deceased and his father and mother, and stands about nineteen feet in height, the die block being four feet in width. On the front of it is a representation of the manner of his death, and on the reverse side the following inscription: "Benj. C. Grenup, aged 24 years, died in the discharge of his duty, May 6, 1856. A truer, nobler, trustier heart, more loving or more loyal, never beat within a human breast." It was placed in the cemetery about three years since, but owing to unavoidable causes its dedication was put off from time to time. A few weeks ago the company took the initiatory steps to dedicate it by appointing a committee of arrangements, &c., and electing Captain T. H. Robinson chief marshal, and Captain James Coleman assistant marshal, selecting Wednesday for the ceremony.

Soon after the arrival of the procession, and when quiet had been obtained, Mr. J. J. Peabody, the president of the Columbia company, introduced Rev. Byron Sunderland, D. D., who offered up an eloquent and fervent prayer. After which the Marine Band performed a solemn dirge. Mr. Peabody then introduced Colonel James A. Tait, who, in an address, reviewed the past history of the fire company of which the deceased was a member. In the course of his remarks Colonel Tait said:

The Columbia Fire Company was organized in 1806. The most of the records of the company were destroyed when the Capitol was burned by the British in 1814.

After the war of 1812, the engine-house was located on Pennsylvania avenue, between First and Second streets east. The company was reorganized in 1814, and again reorganized on the 19th of January, 1818. Of the sixty noble men whose names were inscribed upon the roll of the company at that time, but two are yet living—Simeon Matlock and E. D. Tippet—they are here to-day to witness and participate in the homage due a departed brother fireman.

The speaker paid a glowing tribute to the memory of the patroness of the company, Mrs. E. H. Pendleton, now, alas! no more.

He also spoke at length, and read extracts from speeches and writings of several gentlemen, who were all loud in their commendations of the old Columbia and its energetic membership. He gave a list of the presidents of the company, as follows:

First president, 1818, James Young, (father of Dr. Noble Young, of this city,) John G. McDonald, Daniel Rapine, Henry Tims, Roger C. Weightman, Charles K. Gardiner, Duff Green, James Adams, James A. Tait, William D. Clark, James A. Brown, Thomas F. Robinson, Andrew P. McKenna, J. J. Peabody. The last named six are still living. The speaker closed his oration as follows:

But now we come to that fatal night, May 6, 1856—the night that threw its gloomy mantle over the Columbia Fire Company; the night that robbed us of a gallant member; the night which has brought us here to do honor to the memory of our noble comrade, Benjamin C. Grenup. History records the deeds of those who have served their country. Ecclesiastical history spreads out upon its pages the bright actions of its church followers. The lives of Howard and a host of other philanthropists have been written; but who has written the history of the volunteer fireman killed in the discharge of his duty? Well, let the page be blank; let no word be inscribed to draw from the heart the sympathetic sigh or tear; let the proud look down with contempt upon these self-sacrificing men; but I tell you that under that red shirt beats a heart as free from selfishness, and possessing as high a principle of honor as he who exhibits a finer exterior.

I will not speak of the death of our departed brother. The representation of the scene is faithfully executed by the artist.

Some of us saw him die, and many of us stood around his dead body as it lay in state in our hall.

Poor Ben, beloved by all who knew him. No more shall we see your honest, handsome face. No more shall we hear those sweet baritone notes of song which were wont to thrill the ears of your comrades.

Are we superstitious? Did we receive a death-warning on that fatal night? Those who were present will remember that, while surrounded by his comrades, and while singing his favorite song, "Good-night to all," the bell struck the alarm of fire. The song was half-finished—the singer dead. Farewell, Ben! We have raised a tablet to perpetuate our love for you. Our work is done.

At the conclusion of the address the band of the 44th infantry performed a beautiful air, after which Hon. B. B. French was introduced, and delivered an eloquent address. He was followed by Francis McNeerhany, Esq.

SPEECH OF F. McNEERHANY, ESQ.

Gentlemen of the Fire Department, Mr. Mayor, Members of the City Council, Ladies and Gentlemen:

After what has been so well and appropriately said by the eloquent gentlemen who have preceded me, I shall be very brief on this solemn and interesting occasion.

Since the once manly form of the lamented Grenup was consigned to this grave, the little song birds of spring, for twelve successive seasons, have sweetly warbled near it; the bright flowers of as many summers have bloomed, faded, and decayed around it; the chilling winds of a dozen autumns have swept mournfully over it; and the spotless snows of as many winters have robed it in the beautiful emblem of Heaven's own purity.

Since that sorrowful day we have passed through an eventful period. Friends have indeed been "scattered like roses in bloom," and the gaping grave has claimed more than nature in her ordinary course awards. Thousands of brave men have fallen on the bloody field of battle. Many of them had won more worldly distinction than he in honor of whose memory these imposing ceremonies are performed to-day; but among them all I doubt whether the spirit of a truer moral hero than that of young Grenup passed through the dark portals of the tomb to the brighter realms beyond.

And now, my friends, here on the twelfth anniversary of the death of this noble young man—here under the auspices of his former associates of the Columbia—here in this "silent city of the dead"—here on this beautiful day, in the loveliest month of all the year—we have gathered to witness the dedication of this magnificent monument, designed to honor his name, to commemorate his virtues, and especially to perpetuate the remembrance of the heroic deed in the performance of which he sacrificed his life.

Thus it is, fellow-citizens, that the memory of brave and generous acts will live in perennial freshness long after the frail tenement of clay shall have mingled with its kindred dust. Thus it is that the good man's grave is a stand-point from which, with the eye of faith, we may discern more clearly the sunshine of eternal glory that hallows it.

It was my good fortune to know young Grenup personally. He bore the stamp of true nobility. Nature had formed him in her finest mould. His person was comely and commanding; his bright and genial face, his frank and manly bearing, his warm and generous grasp, were evidences of his unselfish and heroic character. With these noble traits, it was natural that Grenup should have identified himself with a voluntary association—the old Columbia—whose philanthropic purpose it was to save not only the property, but the lives of their fellow-citizens. That company justly held a high position in the fire department, and also an enviable place in the esteem of the community. Among its members were many of our prominent citizens, whose names have been read to you to-day by one of its worthy ex-presidents, Col. Tait. Not only did the old Columbia enjoy the respect and confidence of the citizens of Washington, but it also won the admiration and gratitude of the people of the whole country by its invaluable services on two memorable occasions—once in saving the Capitol, and again in rescuing the Congressional library from impending destruction.

Of this noble company Grenup was a zealous, a devoted, and esteemed member. How faithful he was to duty, how endeared he was to his comrades, this splendid monument silently but eloquently attests. At the sound of the old Columbia bell, whether it rung out in the brightness of day or in the darkness of night, he promptly and cheerfully sprang to duty. The angry, hissing flame, as it leaped to clasp in its fiery embrace the lofty mansion of the rich or the lowly dwelling of

the poor—the stifling smoke, the falling timbers, the crashing walls, these had no terrors for him. Always calm and self-possessed, he bravely encountered the devouring element, and heroically battled to conquer it. It was while on his way to such a scene, on the fatal night of the 6th of May, 1856, that he lost his valuable life; and no higher, no prouder, no more honorable praise could be bestowed upon him than that inscribed on this beautiful monument: "He was killed in the performance of duty." More than this could not be said of the gallant soldier whose warm heart's blood reddens the battle field, and who generously gives up life in defence of his country. The one is no less a hero than the other, for

"Peace hath her victories,
No less renowned than war."

My associations, fellow citizens, with the members of the Columbia Fire Company are among the most pleasing reminiscences of my life. Some fifteen years ago I accompanied them on a visit to New York and other Northern cities. Never shall I forget the magnificent ovations of which they were the recipients; never shall I cease to remember the marked hospitalities which were lavished upon them. The many pleasing incidents of that trip now come vividly back to memory, like beautiful pictures in a gorgeous panorama. Grenup was there; and among his joyous companions it was easy to perceive that he was an especial favorite. He was the light, the life, the very soul of the company. He always had a bright smile and a kind word for every one; and his rich, musical voice, both in song and in story, was ever ready to contribute to the pleasure and amusement of his friends. For twelve years that charming voice has been silent in death; for twelve years the changing skies have alternately smiled and wept over Grenup's grave; for twelve years the lights and shadows of revolving day and night have fallen upon it. The unknown years to come, with their varying seasons, will bedeck it with verdure and mantle it with snow; this now graceful and beautiful monument, under the corroding touch of time, will gradually crumble into dust; but the heroic deed which it is designed to commemorate will live in perpetual remembrance where Heaven's recording angel, with pencil of light, registers the nobler acts of men!

Colonel James B. O'Brien was the last speaker. At the conclusion of his address the audience was dismissed with a benediction. The line was then reformed and the firemen marched to the City Hall, where they were dismissed to their quarters.