

COMMEMORATIVE

BIOGRAPHICAL RECORD

—OF—

WASHINGTON COUNTY,
PENNSYLVANIA,

CONTAINING

Biographical Sketches of Prominent and Representative
Citizens, and of many of the Early
Settled Families.

ILLUSTRATED



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His boyhood days were spent in his native town, where he attended the graded public school. Soon after leaving this school, he was placed under the tuition of E. N. Hartshorn, an enthusiastic and successful instructor, who afterward became a professor in the college at Mt. Union, Ohio. It was at this time in his career that young Duncan, at about the age of eighteen years, first turned his attention to pedagogism. He was elected teacher of a school in Wharton township, one of the mountain districts of Fayette county. In this region, "far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife," he passed one winter amid experiences that were as novel to him as the rugged and snow-

clad scenery of the mountains was grand and imposing. He not only labored for the children but lived among the people. Here were social customs, phases of life, and revelations of fact that were as strange to the new "master" as they were real. As he once expressed the situation: "He not only taught lessons in the three R's from the books, but learned lessons from the pages of life and the volume of nature." Having completed this engagement, he entered Mt. Union College, Ohio, and was there during the bitter contest in 1864 between the faculty and the students relative to the authority of the former over the literary societies. The college authorities, of course, triumphed, and several of the undergraduates who were most active in the affair were dismissed from the institution. Others voluntarily withdrew. Duncan was among the latter and with one of his friends, now Rev. John H. Hartman, was soon afterward pursuing his studies in Vermillion Institute, at Haysville, Ohio. His name appears for two years in the published catalogue of this school, which, under the supervision of Rev. Sanders Diefendorf, was then a flourishing academy, attended by hundreds of students from Canada and eleven States of the Union. While here his health became broken, and he was forced to return home for its recuperation. He was able to resume his studies in the spring of 1866, and matriculated in Washington and Jefferson College, at Washington, Penn., from which he was graduated two years later. The class of 1868 was one of the largest ever sent out by this institution, and on its role of membership are the names of gentlemen who have since attained distinction in their several professions. Among them are Prof. D. J. McAdam, Hon. H. J. Eckly, S. B. Fisher, C. E., James S. Moorhead, Esq., Rev. T. J. Sherrard, Rev. L. M. Gilleland, Hon. W. B. Sutton and others. During his senior year he was both student and teacher in the college (officially tutor), and, as such, had partial charge of the classes of the preparatory department. After graduation he was invited to continue this relation, but, declining so to do, accepted the Superintendency of the public schools of his native town, and continued in that position for two years. Throughout his term of service he was energetic in the administration of both the methods of instruction for use by the assistant teachers and the affairs of discipline among the pupils; and it is said there are now men in the community, whose heads begin to show the silvery touches of years, who when as boys on mischief bent, learned by experience, at this time, that the way of the transgressor was hard. His next move was to East Liverpool, Ohio, where he had been elected Superintendent of Schools. The condition of educational affairs here required a complete reorganization of the system. His plans were, how-

ever, supported by the Board of Control, and he had the co-operation of a corps of efficient teachers. The schools grew rapidly in both membership and reputation under his management, which continued two years. He had, when at college, registered himself as a student of law in the office of I. Y. Hamilton, Esq., and he gave up his position at East Liverpool with a view to the completion of his professional studies. The fall of 1872, however, found him in the ranks from which he had so recently withdrawn. This time he was located in Pittsburgh, Penn., where he continued four years, having supervision, as Principal, of the public schools of the Fifteenth and Seventeenth Wards of that city. As a disciplinarian he was considered firm if not rigid; in methods of instruction he was progressive; and his schools were frequently visited by teachers from other sections of the city. His field of labor was, however, more extensive than the district. He was an active member of the College of Principals, a frequent instructor at teachers' institutes of the city, at times accepted invitations to render similar services for conventions in other counties, lectured at the Teachers' State Association, and was an occasional contributor to the press on subjects relating to the profession in which he was engaged. During the preceding years, he had devoted what time could be appropriated from other duties to his legal studies, and, in the fall of 1875, was admitted to practice law in the courts of Washington county. Subsequently he was admitted to the Supreme Court of the State, and such of the United States Courts as business or other matters rendered desirable. In the summer of 1876 he first located and offered his services as a lawyer at Washington, Penn., where, without interruption, he has continued the practice of law ever since. This was the year of the memorable Presidential campaign in which Tilden and Hayes were the rival candidates. Mr. Duncan threw his energies into the contest, and proving an acceptable speaker addressed numerous meetings throughout the county, making acquaintances and friends as he went. It was not long until he found himself with a fair clientage, and his practice has steadily increased until he is now one of the hardest-worked members of the bar. As a lawyer he is faithful and devoted to his clients and persistent for their welfare and success, or, as has been sometimes said, stubborn in the advocacy of causes entrusted to his care. His library is well supplied with books, which, in the preparation of cases, are brought into frequent requisition, and his briefs usually tend toward elaborateness rather than otherwise. He is an earnest, persistent worker, valuing time according to the results that may be wrested from it; and people who know him attribute whatever success he has attained as largely to level-headedness and patient work as any

other elements of his character. In politics he has always been a Democrat, and in the campaigns preceding general elections usually stumps his own and other counties in behalf of the party with which he is identified. While thus interested in politics, and often a participant in the counsels and conventions of the party of his choice, he has never sought for himself the reward of office but has uniformly refused to be a candidate for positions of a political character. The only apparent exception to this statement was in 1876. That year he was the nominee for district attorney, an office, which falls within the line of his legitimate professional life and to which only lawyers are eligible. In 1888 the Democratic Convention of the Twenty-fourth Congressional District nominated him as the party candidate for Congress in opposition to his known wishes. The convention had been in session two days, during both of which in response to inquiries he had telegraphed forbidding the use of his name and stating his unwillingness to accept the position, if tendered him. Disregarding his protest, the convention proclaimed him the candidate and appointed a committee to give him formal notice of its action. His name was at once published throughout the district as the party representative, and it was said created enthusiasm under the belief that it indicated party success. The committee of notification just mentioned consisted of James H. Hoover, of Fayette county; Joseph A. Skelly, of Allegheny; James Smith, of Greene; and John P. Charlton, of Washington. When waited upon by them, Mr. Duncan adhered to his original resolution and declined to accept the nomination. The prospects of his election were considered flattering, and the district is now represented by a Democrat. The reasons assigned by him were of a personal and private character arising chiefly from a desire to apply his time and energies to the welfare of his family and to business affairs. In his letter of declination, which was widely published and quoted from, he stated that "among his party associates he did not recall a single individual toward whom he entertained the slightest feeling of political animosity or whose advancement he would willingly impede in the least, that he united with unabated interest in the efforts of the people to maintain their liberties against the encroachments of power unjustly exercised whether manifesting itself in the form of monopolizing combinations and trusts, corporate aggregations or official usurpation, that he was uncompromisingly opposed to legislation in the interest of favored classes, to the squandering of the public domain, to oppressive and unnecessary taxation direct or indirect, and to the tendency during the past few years to a centralization of power in the administration of governmental affairs, and that he adhered to the principles of just government administered wisely

and economically for the peace, safety and prosperity of its citizens as a whole, without preference or favor as to class, location, race, or other basis of distinction."

In religion Mr. Duncan is more immediately associated with the denomination of Methodists, in which he has been a communicant for many years. At the time this sketch is written (1893) he is connected with the First M. E. Church of Washington, Penn., and has for years past been a member of its Board of Trustees and Treasurer of its Stewards' Fund. In addition to his professional duties Mr. Duncan is connected with various business and other organizations of the community and county in which he resides, to some of which he sustains official relations. Among them are the following: Director and Vice-President of the Farmers and Mechanics National Bank of Washington, Penn.; member of the Board of School Directors; Trustee and chairman of the Finance Committee of the Dime Savings Institution of Washington, Penn.; Chairman of the Board of Examiners of the Courts of the county; Trustee of the Young Men's Christian Association; President of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and Children; Curator and Treasurer of the Citizens Library Association, and others.