

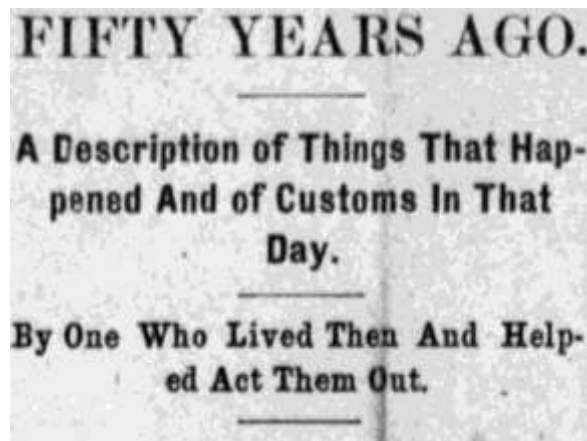
Reminiscences By Philo Vivian Duncan (1820-1893)

By Jerry Long
c.2024



THE BRECKENRIDGE NEWS.

Breckenridge News, Cloverport, KY, Wednesday, 25 May 1892, p.1:



Mr. Editor – Dear Sir. – Fifty odd years ago, the writer of this article came to this place [Cloverport] from Hardinsburg. This is a little beyond your recollection. The crude condition of the country if given in detail would challenge the faith of the present generation.

During my residence in Hardinsburg, which were among the happiest days of my life, it was nothing uncommon for farmers to bring in wolf scalps with which to pay taxes. And as to venison and wild turkeys, they were a drug on the market. And if a hog ever got anything more than an acorn he was lucky.

Once upon a time the writer went hunting and had not gone far beyond the limits of the town when he discovered a deer and raised his gun, but commenced shaking and continued shaking to such an extent that he could not find the trigger, the venison got tired and walked off. I have not seen him since.

Near the town are yet, holes in the rocks where Indians used to beat their hominy. The whites came in afterward and introduced the plan of burning a hole in one end of a stump or short log to hold the corn whilst the pestle was applied perpendicularly with force until the skinny part of the corn was removed. Nothing was more dreaded unless it was to go on Monday morning and

settle with Mr. Curtis, the school master, particularly, if you did not know your task and that well. He did not use the switch so much, but had a way of catching one by the coat collar and walking him up and down the school room and over the benches, and woe betide the one whose legs got in any tangle, as a slap on the right cheek would turn him to the left, and if it were discovered that he was yet a little out of balance, and only a little, a lighter lick on the left cheek would establish his equipoise when the forward movement would begin and the only hope of relief was found in the exhaustion of the teacher. Very few of the pupils ever prayed for Mr. Curtis.

In those days it was very common for the old Revolutionary soldiers to come to town to do their trading and return on horseback the same day. The writer when in his teens would go to Lexington, Ky., for their pensions. This trip required about a week, as it has to be made on horse back – no railroads and few steamboats. One might wait two or three days for a boat, and if he got to Louisville for \$5 he would be lucky. The first packet the writer remembers was the Sylph – so small she would not now fill the Green River locks. This little thing ran from Louisville to Evansville doing the business for both sides of the river.

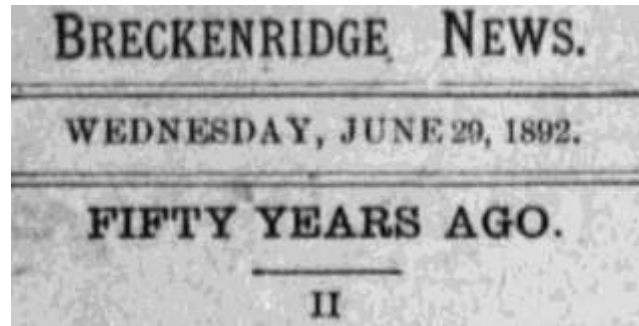
A great many flat boats were used in floating produce to New Orleans, those boats were built on the shore and shoved into the river, the lumber was sawed by hand, by what was termed whip sawing. The writer made several trips on this kind of craft, the first one was covered with lumber, sawed by Ben Bates and I paid him 75 cents per thousand feet for the lumber delivered. As to saw mills there were none of them in this country. Here and there a horse grist mill and occasionally a water mill. The flour made in those days would now be used for chicken feed. I am not yet done Hardinsburg, for there were giants there, morally, mentally and physically, the latter class lived mostly in the country. Disputes would often arise in the country over minor affairs, the greatest insult that could be offered was to call a man a coward, to resent which, a day was appointed at a big court or field muster when the insulted party could vindicate his honor. On the appointed day the parties involved with friends, would repair to some grassy spot in the suburbs and there prepare to settle it. The combatants stripping to the waist and fastening suspenders around them were ready for the signal. When given there was no delay but like bounding deer they made for each other, and if there were ever honest, fair, fighting it was done there and then. If there were any science to the Sullivan manipulations, but main strength and pluck won the day. The combatants hardly ever knew when they were whipped, their friends would have to decide.

One occasion assists my memory materially. It was the custom for ginger cake and persimmon beer to be sold at nearly all the public gatherings. Old Uncle Alex Marshall furnished the best. He ought to have taken out a patent and transmitted it to posterity for nothing like them has been on tap since, as they say. By the way, the one little incident hinted at above is this. Visiting the Pugilistic arena, from time to time I became enthused with the spirit of heroism, having every confidence that I had descended in a direct line from Samson. I concluded to prove my honor the first opportunity. I was not long in finding an equally confident champion in the person of one of those young Marshalls who had had the advantage of me in having been raised on those ginger cakes and persimmon beer. The arrangements were made by our friends and agreed to by us. The code required a line drawn across the road and the challenging party to dare his opponent across the line, this being accepted the engagement was fully on. Would you have the Sequel? Well in less time than it has taken me to write it, Marshall produced in me an admiration for his pluck and quite dispelled every inclination to renown if to be obtained through that channel. We were school boys then.

P. V. D.



Breckenridge News, Cloverport, KY, Wednesday, 29 June 1892, p.3:



Editor Breckenridge News. – In my last communication on the history of Fifty Years Ago, allusion was made to the mental giants as well as the physical in these parts.

To begin, would mention the legal bar at Hardinsburg of resident and visiting lawyers. Of course it will not be expected that I write a history of each or even mention their names, as they were numerous, and so many years have intervened that names have escaped me.

Among them however, I remember Ben. Hardin, who attained national reputation, and deservedly so. Also, Phil. Triplet, the cultivated and accomplished lawyer; John Calhoun, remarkable for his polish and fine physique; Jno. McHenry, of Hartford, the embodiment of honor; Frank Peyton, the dauntless, chivalrous, advocate; J.W. Kincheloe, who would rather die than lie, had not yet begun the practice. So, also, with James Stewart who afterwards became prominent and was frequently retained. Others worthy of mention, I will have to omit lest I worry your patience. Any of the above would have adorned the Halls of Congress, and some have set in the Presidential chair very comfortably.

I have heard speeches in the old Hardinsburg court house that would have done honor to a Roman or Athenian orator. Taking the status of those times as a basis, has there been the advancement in legal knowledge and oratory, that there has been along other lines?

In those days if a murder occurred the guilty was hung. If he stole, he was sent to the penitentiary or flogged at the whipping post. Crimes seemed less frequent, even population considered. In those days, if it could be proven that the offender was under the influence of drink when the crime was committed, it somewhat palliated the offense, as it was the custom, for even the best men to keep their decanter and white sugar ready for a visitor. Now, the first question asked is How much money has the culprit? If a big pile maybe a hitch can be made somewhere along the line. There is the judge, jury, prosecuting attorney and witnesses as well as doctors to make out a case of emotional insanity some one of who may probably yield his honor at the shrine of mammon.

When a boy we would mix up a debating society on Friday evening, and frequently debate such questions as "Which was the more powerful fire or water," or the pen or the sword, never deeming it worth while to consider the dollar as the agency of power. But I have come to see the mistake. The advice of the writer is to always save enough money with which to buy crape to mourn the loss of friends, in case your pocket book should collapse, for great will be the mortuary report.

P. V. D.



The preceding two articles were written by **Philo Vivian Duncan**. He was born at Troy, Perry County, Indiana on 16 August 1820. He was the son of Warren Duncan & Sally Daniel, who were married in Perry County, IN on 17 March 1819. Philo V. Duncan married Susan E. Kinzer on 21 April 1842 in Harrison County, IN. They are listed in the 1850, 1860, 1870 and 1880 Federal censuses of Cloverport, Breckinridge County, KY. P. V. Daniel died 25 October 1893 in Breckinridge County, KY. He and his wife, Susan (1821-1900) were buried in the Murray Cemetery at Cloverport, KY.



Breckenridge News, Cloverport, KY, Wednesday, 1 November 1893, p.5:

Death of Capt. Philo V. Duncan.

The community was shocked by the death of Capt, P. V. Duncan on last Wednesday, the 25th, of October, 1893.

He and his son, Mr. Henry V. Duncan, were driving in the country beyond Mr. John McGavock's farm, and while descending a hill, one of the backing straps broke, frightening the horse which suddenly ran away. Mr. Henry Duncan was first thrown out without injury, but Captain Duncan remained in the buggy, until he was thrown across the wheel and so seriously injured that he died the next day.

Captain Duncan was a prominent figure in Cloverport for many years. Ho came here from Hardinsburg sometime in the forties, without a dollar, and entered business, and for many years was a merchant and tobacconist on a large scale until recent years when age had advanced so far as to somewhat cripple his energies. Latterly his business operations were greatly curtailed.

He was for a part of his business career engaged in steamboating. He ran in the Louisville and Evansville trade the steamer W. A. Eaves, then the Scioto, both excellent packets. He built the "big" Grey Eagle, one of the finest boat, if not the finest boat, __ in this trade. He demonstrated __ energy and intelligence that the __ would support a daily line of first class boats, which led to the formation of the Louisville and Evansville Packet Company which has been in existence for over thirty years, and has successfully maintained good boats until the present day.

Capt. Duncan was untiring In energy and quick and bold in his conceptions. Ho was ever ready in his younger days to lead and aid in all public undertakings. His life was a useful one, and many survive him who were recipients of warm and active sympathy from his generous heart and hand.

He was a faithful and active member of the Methodist church, and during his whole career he stood by his church in darkness and prosperity, never once faltering in his devotion and faith. He died as he had lived, sustained by the religion he so long professed.

He journeyed through life with the woman he had married in his youth, in whom he trusted, and who sympathized with and aided him in every vicissitude of fortune. She survives him enfeebled by age and accident.

He was buried from the church where he had so long worshipped, the funeral services conducted by Rev. Dr., Cottrell.

Mr. Duncan was born at Troy, Ind., and was 73 years, old last August.

