

John Francis Duncombe

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NOTABLE DEATHS.

JOHN FRANCIS DUNCOMBE was born in the town of Waterford, Erie county, Pa., Oct. 22, 1831; he died at Fort Dodge, Iowa, Aug. 2, 1902. His father was a farmer. The son remained at home until he was sixteen, working on the farm in the summers and attending the district school in the winters. He went to Meadville, Pa., for his preparatory studies, entering Allegheny College at that place, where he graduated four years later. In the meantime he had studied awhile at Centre College, Danville, Ky. He taught in the public schools in the winter season to earn money with which to meet his college expenses. His admirable career of self-help and self-reliance began early. He pursued his legal studies after his college days in Meadville and Erie, and was admitted to the bar at the latter place when he was 22 years of age. After practicing his profession a year in Erie he removed to Fort Dodge, Iowa, which thenceforward was his home. From the date of his settlement there few men in any community have led more active or useful lives. He took a place at once at the head of his profession in northwestern Iowa. In addition to a large practice, he was the attorney of the Illinois Central railroad in a district embracing seventeen counties, for a period of over thirty years. While he achieved a proud success as a lawyer, he always counseled amicable settlements out of court where such methods were practicable. A year or two after he settled in Fort Dodge he became the editor of *The Sentinel*, the pioneer journal of northwestern Iowa. Later still, he conducted *The Fort Dodge Democrat*. He was a vigorous and outspoken editor, fearless and aggressive. Always a democrat, he soon rose to a commanding position in his party, which coveted his counsels and leadership, until a few years ago, when he retired from politics. As a speaker he possessed rare ability. He was equally at home before a jury or in arguing a case in the supreme court. In a political canvass his party had no more effective campaigner in the State. But he was never happier than when speaking at a re-union of pioneer settlers. On such occasions he was always a favorite, and his ready wit and rare good humor never failed to elicit the heartiest applause. Mr. Duncombe was chosen to the State Senate in 1859, and served in the sessions of 1860 and 1862. He was twice elected to the House—1871 and 1879. He was, therefore, in the State Legislature eight years—one of the most influential men of his party in each branch. As a legislator he was well-informed, resourceful, bold and aggressive, and generally successful except in partisan measures. The Iowa Pioneer Law Makers chose him as president of their association at its organization February 25, 1886, upon which occasion he delivered an interesting address full of reminiscences of former times. He was a useful man on the Iowa Columbian Commission of 1892-3, and of the Commission which erected the beautiful monument at Lake Okoboji. Had the democracy been in power there was no position in the gift of his State to which he might not have aspired: with an assurance of success. He was also a large farmer, a dealer in lands, and one of the foremost Iowa coal mine operators. Fort Dodge always found in Mr. Duncombe a powerful advocate of her interests. He was a friend of education and of every local improvement, a projector and builder of railroads, a man of affairs in many directions. His most successful business enterprise was no doubt the manufacture of stucco and other products from the gypsum beds adjacent to Fort Dodge. This interest has become one of great importance. A distinguishing event in Mr. Duncombe's life was his participation in the Spirit Lake Expedition of 1857, in which he was the captain of Company B, his own account of which was given with his portrait in *THE ANNALS OF IOWA* (Vol. III, 3d series, pp. 491-508) for October, 1898. It will be remembered that the expedition was under the command of Maj. William Williams. He was one

of the regents of the State University during eighteen of the most important years of its history. Mr. Duncombe was descended from an old English family, the names of many of whose members are worthily embalmed in the famous "Dictionary of National Biography." Some of them were knighted and elected to the British Parliament. His great grandfather was a soldier of the Revolution, and his grandfather bore arms in the war of 1812. He was twice married. His first wife was Miss Carrie Perkins of Erie, Pa., who died in 1854; his second Miss Mary A. Williams, daughter of Maj. William Williams of Fort Dodge, to whom he was married in 1859. His widow, two sons and three daughters survive him.

WILLIAM MILLER BEARDSHEAR was born in Dayton, Ohio, Nov. 7, 1850; he died at the State College, at Ames, Iowa, Aug. 5, 1902. Reared on a farm, his education up to the age of fourteen was confined entirely to the district school, with private instruction at home. When he had attained this age, he enlisted in the volunteer army then engaged in the war for the preservation of the Union. Although under the legal age he had grown so large and lusty that he was accepted as a recruit. His service was in the Army of the Cumberland. Returning from the army he determined, like many another soldier boy, to acquire an education, becoming a student at Otterbein University, Ohio, from which he graduated in 1876. It was his intention to enter the ministry, and he became pastor of the United Brethren church at Arcanum, Ohio. He afterwards attended Yale Theological Seminary two years. Upon leaving the school he became pastor of the church at Dayton, Ohio, but in 1881 accepted the presidency of Western College in Toledo, Iowa. This was a formidable undertaking for a man of thirty, whose experience in educational matters had simply been that of a student, but he entered upon the task with energy and determination, succeeding admirably up to the time the college was destroyed by fire. His efforts to reestablish the school were highly successful, so that when he left in '89 it had entered upon a career of prosperity from which it has had little if any interruption since that time. He came to Des Moines the same year and accepted the superintendency of the West District city schools. During his superintendency the fine high school building of the district was erected. He was also instrumental in obtaining the national flag for every school house under his charge. In 1891 Dr. Beardshear was elected president of the Iowa State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts at Ames. Here, too, a great work had to be done, but Dr. Beardshear proved himself equal to every requirement, and the great school was in the full tide of prosperity at the time of his lamented death. Few indeed are the men who are so superbly equipped for such a great undertaking. Physically large, he was so likewise morally and mentally. In 1894 Dr. Beardshear was president of the Iowa State Teachers' Association. More recently he was chosen one of the directors of the National Educational Association, and last year elected to the presidency of that body. He was in Minneapolis expecting to preside at the annual meeting of the association when he was attacked by the illness which soon terminated his useful career. The remains were laid to rest in the college cemetery near those of the other great president, Dr. A. S. Welch, and Mrs. Margaret Stanton, who was long one of the college faculty. Henry Sabin, the distinguished Iowa educator, said of Dr. Beardshear: "He was more than a teacher; more than a college president; more than a successful man of affairs. His heart reached out for all beautiful things. * * * Even the dreary college catalog, usually redolent only of hard names and dry courses of study, under his touch became almost a poem; fitted for the desk of him who loves beautiful quotation, or appreciates a rare gem from the pen of a great thinker. He had the grace of the ready writer and was a power on the platform. The educational world will be lonesome without him." Dr.

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