

HISTORY  
OF  
JEFFERSON COUNTY  
PENNSYLVANIA

*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES  
OF SOME OF ITS PROMINENT MEN AND PIONEERS*

EDITED BY  
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MCKNIGHT, Hon. W. J., M. D. Alexander and Isabella McKnight *née* McBride were natives of County Down, Ireland. They emigrated in 1790 to Franklin County, Pa. About 1795 they moved to and settled on a farm on Crooked Creek, Indiana county, Pa. They had five daughters and two sons. James, grandfather of W. J. McKnight, settled in Indiana town; held several offices and was married twice, first to Jane McNutt, by whom he had two sons—Alexander, the father of Dr. McKnight, and William, who died A. D. 1830, aged twenty-three years—and second to Jane McComb, by whom he had one son and one daughter, both of whom removed to Texas, where James attained distinction, and Jane is now living as Mrs. Jane Walbridge. Alexander, jr., brother of the grandfather of this sketch, married Susannah Cummins, and had two sons, viz., Hon. William C., who resides in Chambersburgh, Pa., and James A., who resides on the old Crooked Creek homestead in Indiana county, Pa.

Alexander, son of James and Jane McKnight *née* McNutt, married Miss Mary Thompson on the 10th of May, A. D. 1831. Miss Thompson was a daughter of William Thompson, of Indiana county, a sister of Hon. John J. Y. Thompson, and was a granddaughter of Rev. John Jameson, who was born at Ellerslie, Scotland, and whose mother was a Wallace, of Sir William's clan. Alexander and Mary McKnight, *née* Thompson, commenced married life in Blairsville, Indiana county, Pa., and on the 19th of May, A. D. 1832, Amor A. McKnight was born. In November of 1832 they moved to Brookville, Jefferson county, Pa., Mr. McKnight during this winter teaching the second term of school for the new town. In 1833 he was appointed justice of the peace. In 1834 he was appointed county treasurer. He was major of the militia, and fond of military drill. He was a man of fine presence and of much intellectual vigor. He died on the 15th of June, A. D., 1837 aged 27 years, leaving a widow and three children, viz: Amor A. (late Colonel McKnight), Nancy Jane, who died in childhood, and W. J., the subject of this sketch. Mary McKnight, *née* Thompson, married

John Templeton, esq., December 28, 1842, and had three sons — Thomas L., a citizen of Brookville, Jesse J., who died at Fortress Monroe in the service of his country, and Oscar J., who died in childhood. John Templeton died December 8, 1850. Mary Templeton, *née* McKnight, died February 22, A. D. 1860, aged forty-eight years.

Senator McKnight was born in Brookville May 6, A. D., 1836; received a limited education in the common schools. At the age of eleven poverty threw him upon his own resources. He lived and worked on a farm for four years. When sixteen he was employed by Samuel McElhose, of the *Jefferson Star*. At seventeen he commenced the double task of type setting with Jerome Powell, esq., of Ridgway, Pa., and of reading medicine under Dr. A. M. Clarke, of Brockwayville, Pa.

In this way, during a period of three years, by a species of economy known best to himself, he saved enough money to enable him during the winter of 1856-7 to attend a single course of medical lectures in Cincinnati, O. In March, 1857, he opened a medical office in Brookville, and for two years had considerable success. In 1859 he joined Dr. Niver, of Brockwayville, and as the junior member, had a large and active practice during the four years of partnership. In 1863 he returned to Brookville and started a drug store in connection with his practice. His brother, Thomas L. Templeton, joined him in this enterprise. The Dr. gave personal attention to the drug store for six years, after which time the large and extensive business of the firm has been, and is to-day, successfully superintended by Thomas L. Templeton, esq.

In 1864 Governor Curtin appointed Dr. McKnight examining surgeon for Jefferson county. He was also appointed and served as United States pension surgeon for seven years. To faithfully perform other duties he was compelled to resign this position. He served in the militia as private, and orderly sergeant in Company G Fifty-seventh Regiment; was promoted to quartermaster-sergeant, and took part in the campaign against Morgan.

In 1869 he attended lectures in Philadelphia, and received the degree of M. D. He supplemented this course by attending two full courses in succession at Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia, Pa., and graduated there in March, A. D. 1884. In the same year he received a degree from the school of anatomy and surgery. He took a postgraduate course at Jefferson in 1885. January 9, 1860, he married Miss Penelope G. Clarke, a most estimable young lady, and who has proved to be a model wife and mother. The result of this union has been seven children, four living and three dead.

In 1876 Jefferson county presented Dr. McKnight for senator, and Indiana county presented Dr. St. Clair. Conventions were held at Marion, Indiana and Brookville. Finally to secure harmony and to save the congressman—Indiana's nominee—Dr. McKnight handed to the conference the following letter of declination, viz:

GENTLEMEN.—When I received the nomination for senator by the convention of Jefferson county Republicans, by a large and flattering vote, I believed then as I still believe to-day, that I, as the choice of Jefferson county, was then and am to-day entitled to the nomination by the Republican party for senator of this district. But I fully realize the fact that we are in an important political campaign, where the utmost harmony and union are required in all our ranks, and that I, as a faithful Republican, should not ask personal preference antagonistic to the general welfare of the party, but should act honestly for the people, consistent with my Republican principles and just to myself. I have no personal contest. I am nothing, the success of the party is every-

thing. I therefore withdraw from the contest, and hope my friends and the party may act wisely in the interest of the public good. Thanking my friends from the bottom of my heart for their warm support, and their assurance to continue it in the event of my remaining a candidate, I say here in all candor, that I hope I may never be so ungrateful as to forget their kind assurances. I am as ever, Yours truly,

W. J. MCKNIGHT.

Brookville, Sept. 29, 1876.

In 1880 Jefferson county again presented Dr. McKnight as her choice, and Indiana county presented George W. Hood, esq., and a conferee meeting was held at Trade City on the 10th, 11th and 12th of August without result; it was expected by the Republicans of Jefferson, that, inasmuch as Indiana county had the senator in 1865; in 1868; in 1871; and a candidate of their own, at the general election in 1874; and the senator in 1876—sixteen years out of twenty, and the nominee for Congress in 1872; in 1874; in 1876; in 1878, and the nominee again in 1880—that surely it would neither be just nor right for Indiana county again to claim the “turn” or right to the candidate.

But the conferees of Jefferson county were perfectly astounded now, to find at this conference, that Indiana as usual, laid claim to the senatorship; “it was their turn.” And now, with a sense of deep injury, on the third day of this conference, Dr. Hunt, one of the conferees of Jefferson, offered the following resolution, viz:

*Resolved.* “That if a nomination for senator is not made by this conference at the time of 12 o'clock M., this conference adjourn *sine die.*”

This was agreed to, five of the six conferees voting aye.

The dispute was now taken notice of by the State Central Committee, and a request was expressed by this committee that another conference be called and held by Hood and McKnight, and in case of failure then to agree, General James S. Negley, of Pittsburgh, be appointed by the chairman of the State Committee as umpire to meet with the conferees and adjust the difficulty.

Accordingly another conference was agreed upon by Hood and McKnight, and called to meet at Punxsutawney, September 29, 1880.

In this conference, as upon the occasion of all former ones, Indiana county again persisted that it was her “turn” for senator, whereupon Dr. Hunt, a Jefferson conferee, offered the following resolution:

*Resolved.* That we now ask General Negley to take his seat in this conference as umpire, in accordance with the recommendation of the State Central Committee, which was agreed to.

But before calling on General Negley the following paper was prepared and signed by McKnight and Hood, viz:

“We, the undersigned candidates for the nomination of State Senator in the 37th district, do pledge ourselves to abide by the decision of the Umpire, and that his decision shall be final and the nomination shall be made unanimous.

(S'd)

GEORGE W. HOOD.

W. J. MCKNIGHT.”

This was the afternoon of the 29th, and the conference adjourned until the morning of the 30th, in the hope that Mr. Hood might withdraw, or Indiana county yield, but neither Mr. Hood or his conferees would entertain for a moment a suggestion to yield, or withdraw, whereupon the conference was forced to meet on the morning of the 30th with General Negley in his seat as umpire. A ballot was then taken, which resulted

as follows: Henderson, Hunt, Thompson and Negley voted for Dr. McKnight, and Porter, Crawford and Gordon voted for George W. Hood.

Having secured the nomination through the State Central Committee Dr. McKnight was elected to and served in the Senate from 1881 to 1885.

In writing up the Senate of 1883, an able writer said of Senator McKnight: "He lucidly tells the story of his party's extravagance in printing in the past, and makes a needed reform in party lines without kicking in the traces. Sharp, incisive and intelligent, he watches the chances for reform in his own household, and is not afraid to call to account any agent of the State." The doctor took an active part in all debates, and he assisted in moulding and perfecting the general legislation. He originated and carried through several important measures, viz., his reform in printing of public documents, saving the State forty thousand dollars per year; his securing an additional appropriation to the common schools of one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars per year; his reform in the regulation of the commencement of borough and township offices; his active and watchful interest in the wards of the State, and his hearty support to the soldier's orphan's schools, and agriculture, gave him a State celebrity, as well as reflected credit upon his industry, ability and statesmanship. In the regular and extra session of 1883 there was a determined and combined effort on the part of the Democrats and independent Republicans to sacrifice Jefferson county, by placing her in a Democratic district. The following clipping will but feebly explain the situation and struggle at that time, from the *Philadelphia Press*, May 26, 1883: "But probably the most perplexing element in the puzzle is how to accommodate Senator McKnight, of Jefferson. He wants his county put into a Republican Congressional district. Stewart's bill doesn't do this and McCracken's does. But it makes trouble in the detailed arrangement of counties to make Jefferson part of a Republican district." This struggle on the apportionment continued for eleven months, and Senator McKnight overcame the trouble.

The doctor compelled the enforcement of the law auditing the accounts of prothonotaries, registers, etc., which brought in an increased revenue to the State of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. He was the author of numerous measures that fell for want of time, notably one to classify the insane and insane criminals. The object of this bill was to separate the criminal from the ordinary insane. All insane managers throughout the State praised and endorsed this bill. He introduced several amendments to the Constitution, one of which was to extend the term, fix the salary, and lessen the number of legislators. He introduced and came within two votes of carrying through the Senate the resolution to prohibit the manufacture and sale of liquors as a beverage in this commonwealth. He had Jefferson county made into a separate judicial district, but the governor vetoed the general bill. One of his favorite measures which failed for want of time was to enlarge the jurisdiction of justices of the peace, which would have saved Jefferson county every year thousands of dollars. He assisted and hurried through the Senate the bill authorizing counties and municipalities to refund their bonds at a lower rate of interest, which has saved Brookville borough and Jefferson county many dollars.

In 1884 Dr. McKnight was presented by Jefferson county to the district for a second term. G. W. Hood, esq., carried Indiana county. It was hoped and expected by McKnight and his friends, that Mr. Hood would at this time cheerfully acknowledge to Dr. McKnight the established usage by the party of a second term. Mr. Hood had no

elements in him to equal such an occasion. It was "Indiana's turn." Conferences were held without results, and a final disagreement and adjournment was made in Indiana October 1. On October 3, a caucus of Hood's friends was held in his law office, and a pledge written by them referring the dispute to the State Central Committee, and requesting speedy action of the committee. Dr. McKnight was sent for and asked to sign this pledge, which he did. After he signed Mr. Hood signed also, and this pledge Mr. Hood, or his friends, mailed to the State Central Committee. The "pledge," as signed, will be found in Hon. Jno. E. Reyburn's report as umpire. The umpire appointed by the committee and the umpire accepted by Mr. Hood and his friends, and who *agreed* to abide by *any* decision he would make. The following is his report:

PHILADELPHIA, PA., Oct. 10, 1884.

*Hon. Thomas V. Cooper, Chairman State Committee :*

DEAR SIR:—In accordance with your letter of appointment (bearing date, Oct. 4th, 1884), with full power to adjust or settle a controversy in the 37th Senatorial district, composed of the counties of Indiana and Jefferson, I proceeded to the borough of Indiana, arriving there on the 6th inst., and immediately entered upon the performance of the duty imposed.

Upon my arrival I was met by Mr. G. W. Hood, the contestant from the county of Indiana, who with great courtesy and entire absence of any bias in the matter, placed me in communication with large numbers of the Republican citizens of Indiana, with whom, during the afternoon and evening of the 6th, I had full opportunity to acquaint myself with not only the claims of the friends of Mr. Hood, but with the needs of the district generally. On the morning of the 7th, the Hon. W. J. McKnight, contestant from the county of Jefferson, arrived with the three conferees from that county and presented the claims of that gentleman and of their county with vigor and earnestness. The first question that arose was in what way the matter in dispute could be acted upon in a formal and satisfactory manner. The suggestion was made that a meeting of the conferees be held, and I as the presiding officer, and after a full and complete discussion, a ballot taken, whereupon if a tie should again appear, I should cast the deciding vote. I stated to both the contestants that I held other views as to the manner of procedure, but if this was thought to be the better and more satisfactory, I would yield and take part in the conference. After consultation they agreed, and 1 P. M. of that day, Tuesday, 7th inst., was fixed, and promptly at that hour the conference convened, the proceedings of which are best told by the minutes which are hereby inserted:

INDIANA, PA., Oct. 7, 1884.

The Senatorial conferees in the 37th Senatorial district meet and there is present on behalf of Jefferson county Messrs. W. H. Gray, James A. Cathers and S. W. Temple, and on behalf of Indiana county, Hon. A. W. Kimmel, J. W. Books, esq., and E. H. Moorhead, esq., and upon the coming of the conference to order the Hon. John E. Reyburn, of Philadelphia president *pro tem.* of the Senate of Pennsylvania, laid upon the table a letter submitting the controversy to the decision of the State Committee, and signed by W. J. McKnight and G. W. Hood, and in the words and figures following:

INDIANA, PA., Oct. 3, 1884.

*To the Republican State Committee :*

GENTLEMEN:—The undersigned candidates for State Senate in the 37th Senatorial district beg leave to inform you, that after repeated meetings our conferees have

adjourned *sine die*, without a nomination. If we both continue to be candidates, the probabilities are that a Democrat will represent this district in the State Senate during the next four years. This we do not desire, and as our conferees failed to settle the matter between us, we hereby submit the whole case to the consideration of your body, and agree to abide by any decision of the matter the committee may make.

We ask for speedy consideration of the subject.

W. J. MCKNIGHT.

GEO. W. HOOD.

The Hon. Mr. Reyburn also laid upon the table a letter from Hon. Thos. V. Cooper, the chairman of the State Committee, to him, empowering him to act as the representative of the State Committee which letter was in these words:

HEADQUARTERS STATE COM., †  
PHILA., Oct. 4th, 1884. †

*Hon. John E. Reyburn, Member of the Republican State Committee, 5th Senatorial District:*

DEAR SIR:—The candidates of Indiana and Jefferson counties, for the Republican nomination for State Senator, whose respective conferees failed to agree and adjourned *sine die*, have in writing submitted the whole case to consideration of the State Committee, agreeing over their own signatures to abide by any decision of the matter which the committee may make. You are hereby appointed as the representative of the State Committee with full power to adjust or settle the controversy, and your decision in the matter shall be final. The Republicans of both counties ask for immediate action, and you are requested to enter at once upon this commission.

Very truly yours,

THOS. V. COOPER, Chairman.

And thereupon, upon the reading of the said letter of submission, and letter of authorization, the said Hon. John E. Reyburn, of Philadelphia, took his seat as a member of the Senatorial Conference of the 37th Senatorial District. Upon motion of John W. Books, esq., the said Hon. J. E. Reyburn was unanimously chosen as chairman of the conference, and upon motion E. H. Moorhead, esq., of Indiana, was chosen secretary. Upon motion the conference proceeded to the nomination of a senator, and thereupon Indiana county presented the name of George W. Hood, esq., and Jefferson county presented the name of Hon. W. J. McKnight. Remarks were made on behalf of Mr. Hood by Hon. A. W. Kimmel, John W. Books, esq., and E. H. Moorhead, esq., and on behalf of Dr. McKnight by Messrs. Cathers, Gray and Temple. E. H. Moorhead moved that the conference adjourn to 7:30 P. M., but at the suggestion of Mr. Books the motion was withdrawn.

Mr. Moorehead suggested that the conference adjourn until 8 o'clock P. M., but the suggestion being opposed by the conferees from Jefferson county, no motion to that effect was made.

Upon motion, it was agreed to, that the conference proceed to a ballot for senator, and upon the roll being called, W. H. Gray voted Senator McKnight, J. A. Cathers voted Senator McKnight and Samuel W. Temple voted Senator McKnight. Hon. A. W. Kimmel voted George W. Hood, John W. Books voted George W. Hood, and E. H. Moorehead voted George W. Hood, and Hon. J. E. Reyburn voted Senator McKnight, and upon the announcement of the vote by the secretary, the chairman announced that Senator McKnight was the nominee of the conference. E. H. Moorhead thereupon moved that the nomination be made unanimous, and after the motion was put, the chairman declared that the nomination was made unanimously.

The chairman then proceeded to state at length the reasons that impelled him to cast his vote in favor of Senator McKnight. On motion of E. H. Moorhead a vote of thanks was tendered to the Hon. J. E. Reyburn for his labor in settling and composing the conference in the 37th Senatorial District.

On motion, the conference adjourned *sine die*.

JOHN E. REYBURN, President.

E. H. MOORHEAD, Secretary.

It only remains for me to refer to a few of the reasons urged in behalf of the two counties comprising the district, and which influenced my conclusion. On behalf of Indiana it was urged

*First*, That when Mr. Hood yielded four years ago, she should have the next term without opposition on the part of Jefferson county;

*Second*, That she, by reason of her strong Republican majority, was entitled to it by right;

*Third*, That the nomination for Congress had been given to Jefferson, therefore Indiana should have the senator.

These reasons were given in many forms and in great variety, but there was a constant reiteration of the same. To this Jefferson denied that such a promise was made either by Hon. W. J. McKnight, or any one authorized to speak for her; to the second and third propositions, that the political history of the two counties showed that she had always given way to Indiana county, and that that county had been represented both in the councils of the Nation and State far more than was just or demanded by reason of her greater number of Republican votes.

Thus I found the obstacles to peace and harmony were those of locality, confined entirely within certain imaginary lines, and likely to occur every time there was a contest, leaving ill feeling and resentment to be carried into the most trivial affairs.

This has been the case for a number of years, and knowing the anxiety of the committee to arrive at some result which would look towards the prevention of these contentions, I therefore sought for a solution of this and at the same time an action which would give the district an assurance of a representation in some degree commensurate with the high character and intelligence of its people.

At one of the meetings of the conferees, Jefferson had offered a resolution to settle the controversy upon the basis of two terms for her and three for Indiana, or Jefferson eight years and then Indiana twelve in succession, thus acknowledging the claims of Indiana because of her superior numbers.

As to the fitness of the two contestants I found Mr. Hood a man of high character and attainments, fully qualified to do honor both to the district and to himself.

I also found the Hon. W. J. McKnight to be of like high character, and I listened attentively for any expression of dislike or objection to his past course in the Senate, and failed to hear even an intimation of that kind.

Finding the men in their personal characters so nearly equal, and the question one of locality, determined to set both the men and claims of locality to one side and endeavor to decide the question for what seemed to be the best interests of our party and the good of the district. The interests of the party were, to my mind, to be better served by deciding in favor of Jefferson, upon the basis proposed by her conferees, and I think all fair minded men will agree, that where a district is represented by a man of good character, whose course upon all the questions coming before the highest repre-



sentative body of a great State like ours, and whose action upon these questions fails to bring forth a fault-finder, that district is best served by at least two terms, and I might be warranted in going beyond even the fixing of any limit, and so after weighing all the facts, considering all the interests with a deep sense of the grave responsibility of my position, I thought best for these reasons, to cast my vote in favor of the Hon. W. J. McKnight, the present senator, and the contestant from Jefferson.

Yours respectfully,

JOHN E. REYBURN.

After the nomination was regularly and unanimously made on the 7th day of October, A. D. 1884, Dr. McKnight received the following communication :

“ INDIANA, Pa., October 15, 1884.

DR. W. J. MCKNIGHT. DEAR SIR.—Inasmuch as the day of election is almost here, and in view of the action of the Republican county committee of this county to-day, and with an earnest desire for the success and harmony of the party in this Senatorial District, I desire to make you a proposition, which, I think, if adopted will solve the vexed problem. It is this: withdraw our letter to the State committee; let the Senatorial conference be reconvened, and permit that body to select a seventh man from an adjoining county, and to this tribunal we submit which of us shall be the candidate of the Republicans of the district. In this manner we will gain time, which is now a matter of grave necessity. If this proposition meets your approbation, I feel sure that it will be for the best interests of the party. As this letter will be handed you to-morrow, may I hope for an answer not later than Friday, October 17. Awaiting a reply, and expressing the wish for the success of our party in this district. I am

Very respectfully,

GEORGE W. HOOD.

Reply of Dr. McKnight :

INDIANA, Pa., October 16, 1884.

G. W. HOOD, Esq. MY DEAR SIR.—Your letter of October 15 received, and contents noted. As I am now the regular nominee of the Republican party of this district for State senator, I am not at liberty to participate in any future conferences on that subject. My duty is now to work for the success of the whole ticket. For your information as to the regularity of my nomination, I enclose you a paper marked “A,” which fully explains your and my final action on that subject.

Very respectfully,

W. J. MCKNIGHT.

Dr. McKnight, after the report of Senator Reyburn had been received, addressed himself to the work of the campaign. Mr. Hood, on the other hand, unwilling to have his senatorial aspirations checked in any way, determined to run as an independent candidate, relying on the large vote of Indiana to carry him through. In this he was successful. W. P. Hastings, the Democratic candidate, believing that his election was certain with two Republican candidates in the field, made but little effort, and Mr. Hood was elected by a plurality of twenty-three votes. The large Republican vote for Mr. Hood in Jefferson county was cast by the rank and file of the party to prevent the election of a Democratic senator—a result especially undesirable in view of the fact that two United States Senators would be voted for by a senator chosen at this election.

Time has thus far laid his hand lightly on Dr. McKnight. As a physician he has been eminently successful, and as a business man energetic and useful.