

JUDGE JOHN P. BLAIR. A worthy descendant of a time-honored family and a fitting representative of that grand old Scotch-Irish race so distinguished for high moral character, unflinching courage and undying patriotism, is Ex-Judge John P. Blair, who ranks high among the foremost jurists and the ablest lawyers of Pennsylvania. He is a son of Rev. David and Margaret (Steele) Blair, and was born at Indiana, Indiana county, Pennsylvania, March 28, 1835. Among the liberty-loving and God-fearing Scotch-Irish Presbyterian families of the north of Ireland, was the Blair family from which Judge Blair is descended. His paternal grandparents, Hugh and Jane Blair, were members of Donagar Associate Presbyterian church and were highly respected in the community in which they resided. They were the parents of eight sons and three daughters. They came to the United States in 1802, and after spending one winter at Steubenville, Ohio, removed to near Hartstown, Crawford county, Pa., where Hugh Blair purchased a four hundred acre tract of land. He here lived an exemplary life and died January 5, 1837, when in the ninety-sixth year of his age. His wife had preceded him to the tomb by two years, having passed away on March 10, 1835, aged ninety years. Their eighth son, Rev. David Blair, a graduate of the oldest theological seminary of the new world and the founder of the United Presbyterian church in Indiana and adjoining counties, was born in the parish of Donagar, in Antrim, Ireland, in November, 1786. In early life he was somewhat delicate. Having fitted for college with Rev. McLean, he entered Jefferson college in 1810 and would have graduated in the class of 1812 if his health had not given way early in that year. Recovering his health somewhat, he spent the required four sessions at Dr. Anderson's Theological seminary,--was ordained in October, 1818, to the ministry of the Associate Presbyterian church and installed as pastor of the United congregation of Indiana, Crooked creek and Conemaugh. He spent nearly half a century in laboring for these churches, and as the result of his labors nearly twenty congregations were built up out of them--an unparalleled fact in the history of the United Presbyterian church. While inheriting the sturdy independence and iron-willed determination of his own race, he was remarkably liberal, charitable and enlightened in his views. Rev. W. S. Owens pays the just and eloquent tribute of his character.

"He resisted the narrow spirit of exclusiveness and advocated always the broad principles of Christian charity and unity. No man worked harder to secure that happy union of 1858 (union of Associate and Associate Reformed churches) which gave birth to our United Presbyterian church. In the great civil war he was a Union man and his pulpit gave form no uncertain sound on the mighty issues then pending." Rev. David Blair, in 1821, married Margaret Steele, of Huntingdon, who was a help-meet to him in the fullest sense of that term. After a long life of quiet and unostentatious usefulness she was called hence April 6, 1865, when in the sixty-fourth year of her age. In 1862 he resigned from active pastoral work. In 1882 in the ninety-fifth year of his life and in the land of his noble life-work as an able minister and excellent man, death quietly summoned him to the realms of everlasting peace.

Hon. John P. Blair was reared at Indiana, and after completing his academic studies entered Washington college, from which he was graduated in the class of 1852. In 1853 he entered the law office of his eldest brother, Hon. Samuel S. Blair, of Hollidaysburg, and after the required course of reading was admitted to the bar in 1856. During the ensuing year he located at New Castle, Lawrence county, this State, where he practiced until 1859, when he was elected district attorney of that county. He resigned

when the late war broke out and enlisted as a private in Co. F., 12th regt., Pa. Vols. At the end of his three months' term of service he re-enlisted as a private and was elected first lieutenant of Co. I, 100th regiment, Pa., Vols. He held this position until after the battles of Second Bull Run, Chantilly and Antietam, when the company, whose ranks had been greatly thinned by the battles through which it had passed, was consolidated with Co. G, and he was commissioned captain of the new-formed company, which was designated as Co. G. When Hilton Head and Beaufort were captured, in the fall of 1861, he was detailed from his company to act as provost marshal and judge advocate general of the Port Royal district, which position he held until his brigade was sent north to join McClellan on the Peninsula. He was twice wounded. At the first assault on the enemy's earth-works in the rear of Fort Sumter, in Charleston harbor, a grapeshot struck his sword and inflicted wound in his side and at the second Bull Run battle, where his company suffered severe loss, he received a painful gun-shot wound. After passing through the campaign against Vicksburg, under Grant, and the campaign in east Tennessee, under Burnside, he suffered from a fever, the seeds of which were sown at Vicksburg and which clung to him so tenaciously as to eventually disable him for further service, and he was honorably discharged on the 31st day of May, 1864. Soon afterward and before his own recovery his mother died, leaving his father alone—the other children being married and residing elsewhere—and at the request of his father he left New Castle and commenced the practice of his profession at Indiana, when his health was sufficiently restored, in the fall of 1865. He was soon employed in important cases and in a short time attained a high standing at the bar. He tried his cases upon their merits, became an impressive, earnest and successful jury pleader and developed those qualities so essential to a calm, unbiased and unimpassioned consideration of legal matters. His ability, learning, and thorough knowledge of the law recommended him to the public as capable of filling the highest judicial position with the gift of the people of Indiana county, and in 1874 he was elected president judge of the Fortieth Judicial District of Pennsylvania, composed of the county of Indiana. When Judge Blair took his seat on the bench, he found the business of the district many years behind, owing to the fact that the county had previous to his election been included, with Armstrong and Westmoreland counties, in the Tenth Judicial District of Pennsylvania, and its judge had found it impossible to keep up with the business of three counties. Judge Blair entered upon the duties of his office with the purpose and ambition of disposing of this accumulated mass of business, still further increased by the financial disturbances commencing in the fall of 1873, with such rapidity as would be consistent with care and accuracy, and would leave the dockets entirely clear at the end of this term. It was no ordinary task, but a labor of gigantic proportions; yet he succeeded in its accomplishment and left a clean docket to his successor in office at the end of his ten years' term. He decided causes upon their merits alone after such careful and thorough examination of every authority bearing upon them, as the circumstances would allow, and by his entire impartiality and able decisions won the esteem of the public and attained high standing as a judge before the supreme court. The records of his district will show that, notwithstanding the number of jury cases tried by him, he has the rare distinction of never being reversed in any of them. At the end of his term, in 1885, he resumed and has continued successfully the practice of law in Indiana and various other counties and before the supreme court of Pennsylvania. Judge Blair is a regular attendant of the Presbyterian church and a member of the Union

Veteran Legion. He is a stock-holder and director and the solicitor of the First National Bank of Indiana. He has one of the finest residences and most beautiful home in Indiana county. On February 14, 1866, he was married to Elizabeth Sutton, daughter of James and Sarah Sutton, of Indiana. Judge and Mrs. Blair are the parents of three children, two sons and one daughter: Margaret S., James S., and David.

In politics Judge Blair has ever steadfastly held to the principles of the Republican party. As a lawyer he is well read and easily grasps the salient points of his cases. As a counselor his comprehensive knowledge of the general principles of law render his advice very valuable and as a jury pleader he is logical in argument and convincing in manner. Before public bodies and in large assemblages or important gatherings, he is strong and impressive speaker, who clothes logical argument in appropriate and eloquent language.