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## Will the Real James Duncan Please Stand Up?

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## **Abstract**

From 1956 through 1967 viewers enjoyed one of the most popular early television shows, To Tell the Truth. Host Bud Collyer would call on three contestants, standing side by side, to explain briefly who they were. Giving different stories, all claimed to be one and the same person. When they finished making their presentations, the host would turn to a panel of four, asking them to identify the only contestant who was in fact telling the truth about himself or herself. Then Collyer would ask that person to please stand up.

There were two contemporaries, both named James Duncan, who figure prominently in the life of Adams and Cumberland counties, Pennsylvania, in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Recent attempts to explain who they were and what they did have resulted in just enough confusion that neither man would likely have qualified for appearing as a contestant on To Tell The Truth. The time has come to set the record straight, at least to the extent that the available credible evidence makes it possible for us to ask the real Adams County James and the real Cumberland County James to please stand up. [*excerpt*]

## **Keywords**

Adams County Historical Society, ACHS, Adams County, Pennsylvania History, James Duncan, James Gettys, Gettysburg, Cumberland County

## Will The Real James Duncan Please Stand Up?

*By Charles H. Glatfelter and Wayne E. Motts*

From 1956 through 1967 viewers enjoyed one of the most popular early television shows, *To Tell the Truth*. Host Bud Collyer would call on three contestants, standing side by side, to explain briefly who they were. Giving different stories, all claimed to be one and the same person. When they finished making their presentations, the host would turn to a panel of four, asking them to identify the only contestant who was in fact telling the truth about himself or herself. Then Collyer would ask that person to please stand up.

There were two contemporaries, both named James Duncan, who figure prominently in the life of Adams and Cumberland counties, Pennsylvania, in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Recent attempts to explain who they were and what they did have resulted in just enough confusion that neither man would likely have qualified for appearing as a contestant on *To Tell The Truth*. The time has come to set the record straight, at least to the extent that the available credible evidence makes it possible for us to ask the real Adams County James and the real Cumberland County James to please stand up.

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We begin with the Adams County James, who already has a biographer. Was he telling the truth?

Between 1976 and 1991 Princeton University Press published five volumes of a work titled *Princetonians...A Biographical Dictionary*, which included sketches of Princeton graduates between 1748 and 1794. One of these was James Duncan, a 1775 graduate of what was then known as the College of New Jersey.

Although the author of the James Duncan sketch listed the 1886 history of Cumberland and Adams counties first among the sources consulted, he neither used it carefully nor gave any evidence he ever consulted the resources of the historical societies of either of the two counties. Consequently, he made the following statements: The Duncan name was so common at the time that James's "parentage is obscure." In the 1790s he owned a store in Abbottstown. He did not live there because it had no Presbyterian church. In 1799 "he purchased two parcels of land in James Gettys's lottery for the town that became Gettysburg." In 1801 he was appointed "the first prothonotary of Adams County." He was a candidate for a seat in the United States House of Representatives in 1812 and again in 1820. Early in 1821 he resigned both the Congressional seat to which he had just been elected and his county office.<sup>1</sup>

Every statement in the preceding paragraph is either false or at least misleading, as it applies to the Adams County James Duncan.

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The author of the Princeton sketch stated that the Adams James Duncan was born in Philadelphia in 1756. We have found no proof of this, but it is probably accurate. His tombstone records that he was eighty-nine years old when he died in June 1844.

His parentage was anything but obscure. He was the son of Seth Duncan (1730-1793) who, possibly coming from Philadelphia, was granted a tavern license in Hellam township, which was located east of the town of York, in 1764. Three years later he was granted a license for a tavern in the new town of Berwick, founded by John Abbott in 1763 and soon thereafter more often known as Abbottstown. The life of a tavern license was one year. Seth applied for and received renewal of his for about a quarter century. Many tavernkeepers were also merchants. In several early deeds Seth was described as a shopkeeper.<sup>2</sup>

Seth and his first wife, Ann, were the parents of at least nine children, the oldest of whom was named James. After she died in 1777, leaving him with four minor children, Seth married Christina Bittinger (1748-1821), daughter of one of the most prominent German families in the area. They had two children. The 1783 tax list for Berwick Township, in which Abbottstown was located, identified ten persons in the Duncan household.<sup>3</sup>

After an illness of some years (his 1785 will described him as being weak in body), Seth Duncan died on August 3, 1793. The many papers generated by his estate indicate that he was still a tavernkeeper and storekeeper. The twenty-four page inventory of his personal property demonstrates just how many items one could purchase in the village of Abbottstown in 1793. Seth owned three farms, totaling more than 400 acres in area, as well as five properties in Abbottstown and Hunterstown.<sup>4</sup>

The minister of the Presbyterian church in Hunterstown conducted Seth's funeral, but he was buried with his first wife in the graveyard of Emanuel Reformed, now United Church of Christ Church in Abbottstown. In his will, Seth named as his executors his son James and two "trustworthy friends," William Scott and Robert McPherson, both of whom were among the leading political figures in what was still York County both before, during, and after the American Revolution. McPherson died in 1789, leaving the task to the other two.<sup>5</sup>

Although two children had been born to Seth Duncan after he made his will in 1785, for some unknown reason he had neither added a codicil to nor replaced that document in order to provide for them. Christina Duncan challenged the authority of the executors, and it was only on March 31, 1794 that the will was actually probated and the two surviving executors were authorized to proceed with what was a complicated task. There were at least three heirs of the estate who were minors. Real estate in three townships and two towns had to be sold, at the highest price possible. Scott and Duncan presented a first account to the court in 1810, but the final one was not submitted until 1822.<sup>6</sup>

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The Adams County James Duncan was not yet a teenager when his family moved to Abbottstown in 1767. Possibly intending to prepare for the Presbyterian ministry, as the Princeton biographer believed, he entered Princeton College in the fall of 1773 and was graduated two years later.<sup>7</sup>

What he did during the rest of 1775 and most of 1776 we do not know, but on November 3, 1776 he was commissioned second lieutenant in a regiment which Moses

Hazen had recruited and of which Congress made him the colonel in January 1776. Although it was initially authorized to be raised in Canada, Congress later permitted its recruiters to draw from all of the thirteen states. In November 1779 Hazen informed General George Washington that “its officers are raised and the Regiment recruited from North Carolina to Canada.” Probably best known as the Second Canadian Regiment, it was also called Hazen’s and Congress’s own.<sup>8</sup>

Promoted to first lieutenant in the Second Canadian Regiment on April 8, 1777 and to captain on March 25, 1778, James Duncan remained with the unit until he retired from the service in June 1783.<sup>9</sup> He participated in most or all of its many engagements, from Quebec to Staten Island, Brandywine, Germantown, and Yorktown. The journal which he kept from October 2, 1781 until it ends abruptly thirteen days later, four days before the surrender of Cornwallis, has been published several times.<sup>10</sup> At least some of his last days in the service were not especially happy ones. In 1782 he complained to Washington that several younger officers had been promoted unfairly ahead of him.<sup>11</sup>

In May 1783 Duncan was one of the officers in his regiment who signed the founding document of the Society of the Cincinnati, the famous organization of officers formed as the army was disbanding.<sup>12</sup>

On October 6, 1786 the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, “in consideration of the services rendered by James Duncan Captain in the late army of the United States,” awarded him a grant of 500 acres in what were designated the Donation Lands. The grant was located in what was then Westmoreland County, but in what became Mercer County in 1800.<sup>13</sup>

During the decade after retiring from the army in 1783, James Duncan appears to have divided his time between Abbottstown and Philadelphia. In 1785 and again in 1788 he was listed as a single man and a taxable in Berwick Township. The register of the Second Presbyterian church in Philadelphia records the marriage of James Duncan to Susanna Lear on September 11, 1788. The couple may have been living in the city when Seth Duncan died less than five years later.<sup>14</sup>

The account which Executors James Duncan and William Scott filed on April 13, 1810 recorded in great detail the numerous expenses which James had incurred in 1794 and 1795 in traveling on estate business between Philadelphia, Hunterstown (where Scott lived), and Abbottstown. Then, in June 1795 the York County orphans court granted his request, as the eldest son, to take his father’s remaining real estate at the court-determined valuation. He probably moved to Abbottstown about this time. The Berwick Township tax lists for 1797 and 1799 place him there. On October 1, 1797 he was appointed postmaster of Abbottstown and two years later he was described as a storekeeper.<sup>15</sup> But for the opportunity which the creation of a new county in January 1800 created for him, James Duncan might have ended his career as a merchant, perhaps a tavernkeeper, and a prominent citizen of Abbottstown, worthy successor of his father.

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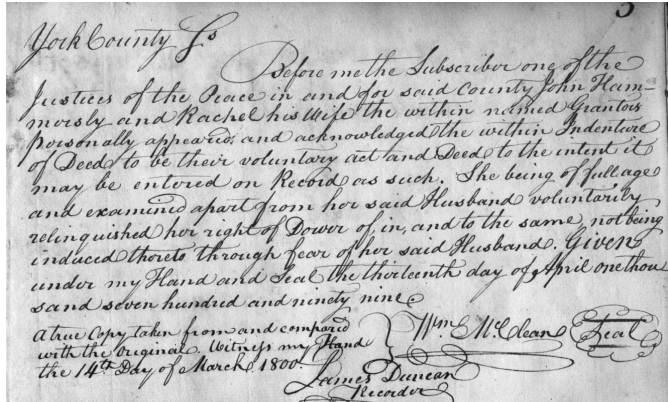
After about a decade of efforts by many citizens of the western parts of York County, the state legislature approved a bill creating Adams County, which the newly elected

governor, Thomas McKean, signed into law on January 22, 1800. Among the few offices which he could fill in the new county were those of clerk of the courts, prothonotary, recorder of deeds, and register of wills. He awarded all of them to James Duncan on January 24, 1800, two days after he signed the law creating the county. There were a dozen or more men of his age and experience who were lifelong residents of the new County and equally qualified for the offices to which he was appointed. Most of them were Federalists. At this time in his career the new governor was an ardent Democrat, as was James Duncan.<sup>16</sup>

Dutifully, James Duncan entered on pages 30-33 of the first Adams County deed book the text of the six commissions he had received, all dated January 24, 1800: recorder of deeds, register of wills, clerk of the oyer and terminer court, prothonotary, clerk of the quarter sessions court, and clerk of the orphans court. The first estate was created February 13, 1800. The first deed he recorded was dated March 14, 1800. The first court session assembled on June 9, 1800.<sup>17</sup>

Under the terms of the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1790, these row officers, as they came to be called, served at the pleasure of the governor. In 1802, 1809, 1812, and 1815 Duncan was recommissioned to continue serving in all four offices. His signature on many hundreds of official documents generated during his long tenure is evidence that he was a busy man who came in contact with many hundreds of Adams countians.<sup>18</sup>

Early in 1800 Duncan resigned as postmaster of Abbottstown and began the difficult task of disposing of his other



The first deed which James Duncan entered for record in Adams County on March 14, 1800. Note that it was a deed which had been signed and executed almost a year earlier.

**To be Rented,**  
(For one or more Years.)  
**THAT LARGE & COMMODIOUS**  
**Dwelling-House,**  
LATE the Property of JAMES GETTYS, deceased, situate in York-street in the borough of Gettysburg, now occupied by JAMES DUNCAN, Esq. The house is well calculated for a Private Family and a Store, or for a House of Public Entertainment—it having been occupied for many years as a Tavern. The Stables are large and convenient; other Out houses and a good Garden Lot are attached and very conveniently situated to the said Property. Terms will be made known by  
**DAVID EDIE, GUARDIAN.**  
Gettysburg, Jan 12. tf

The Duncan family was living in the late James Getty's property, January 12, 1819.



interests there. By the time the census of 1800 was taken, he and his family were living in the part of Cumberland Township which included the town of Gettysburg. He began acquiring real estate there, but strange as it may seem neither the county nor Gettysburg borough tax lists (the town became a borough in 1806) indicated that he was assessed for a house and lot, rather than for a lot only, except in the years 1811-1813. During their other years in Gettysburg he and his family must have lived in houses they rented. In 1819, for example, they were occupying a dwelling house on York Street once owned and occupied by James Gettys, who died in 1815.<sup>19</sup>

There does not appear to be a complete and accurate record of the family of James Duncan. The usual sources for yielding such information – including wills, administrations, deeds, and Bible records – are all lacking in this case. We have concluded that Susanna Lear was in fact the wife of the Adams County James, but her first name has not been found in any record we have consulted, either in Adams or Mercer County. The censuses of 1800, 1810, and 1820 record respectively twelve, eight, and eight persons in the family of James, but only his name is mentioned as its head. In April 1800, long before Pennsylvania had a public school law, fourteen residents of Cumberland Township agreed to send children to a school to be established in Gettysburg. James Duncan agreed to send two children, but no names were given.<sup>20</sup>

We have identified three children born to James Duncan and his wife. John Nicholson Duncan (1796-1860) moved to Mercer County with his father and eventually acquired most of his real estate there. Juliana Duncan (1800-1836) married John R. Thornton in 1820 and died in Greenville, Mercer County, in 1836. James Jefferson Duncan (1801) married Louise Clark in Mercer County in 1825 and also acquired part of his father's real estate.<sup>21</sup>

The Gettysburg *Compiler* for March 16, 1825 reported the death “on the 18th of February, in Mercer County, [of] Mrs. Duncan, wife of James Duncan, Esq. formerly Prothonotary, etc. of this county.” Even in death this woman was not accorded the courtesy of a first name.<sup>22</sup>

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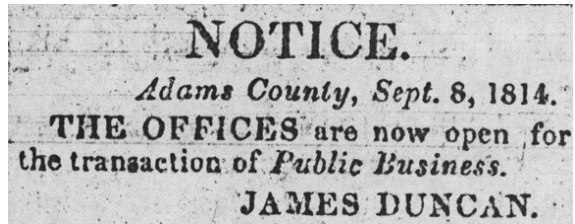
When war with Great Britain was declared in June 1812, the United States was poorly prepared to wage it on land or sea. Efforts to invade Canada failed. The Indians who joined the British inflicted heavy American casualties. Business interests suffered greatly from the effective British blockade. American victories at sea raised morale but had no effect on the blockade. When the British defeated Napoleon in April 1814, they immediately embarked upon a campaign against the Americans on three fronts: Lake Champlain, the Chesapeake Bay, and New Orleans.

The results of this effort were only partly evident when the residents of Gettysburg gathered for the customary observance of the Fourth of July 1814. Calling themselves “the Friends of Peace, and the Established Laws of Nations,” the Federalists chose their officers for the day, enjoyed “a very sumptuous dinner,” and then engaged in many toasts. One was to George Washington, “first in War – first in Peace – and first in the hearts of his countrymen.” This was followed by one to James Madison, “pusillanimous in War

– visionary in Peace – and last in promoting the interest of his country.” The Democrats chose as their officers for the day Dr. William Crawford, candidate for reelection to Congress, and James Duncan. They too had “a sumptuous dinner”, followed by toasts, each one of which was “reverberated by a discharge from the field piece.” After the day, the people, the constitution, and others, they toasted James Madison: “the enlightened friend of his Country – Every friend to its welfare and liberty will rally round and support her at every hazard while their Country is in danger.” Then, “after firing an evening gun, the company retired peaceably to their respective homes.”<sup>23</sup>

As the British forces entered the Chesapeake Bay and in late August captured Washington, setting fire to most of the government buildings, a unit calling itself the Gettysburg Volunteer Corps was organized and marched to Baltimore. Little is known of this unit except for the list of 110 of its members which its first lieutenant submitted to the *Gettysburg Compiler* in 1850 and for a notice in the *Sentinel* on September 28, 1814 requesting those “who lately served a tour of duty at Baltimore” to meet for the purpose of receiving the compensation due them.<sup>24</sup>

The list of members of this unit includes some of the leading citizens of Gettysburg, both Democrats and Federalists, some of them well past what one would consider military age. The name of James Duncan, now in his late fifties, is among them. He



*Following his return from defense of Baltimore, James Duncan reopens his office, September 8, 1814.*

inserted a notice dated September 8 in the *Sentinel* stating that “the offices are now open for the transaction of Public Business.” A week before the actual bombardment of Fort Mchenry, Duncan, and probably the rest of his unit, was back at work in Gettysburg.<sup>25</sup>

The end of the war on more favorable terms than might have been expected in 1813 or 1814 prompted President James Monroe, in his inaugural address in 1817, to explain what he meant by “the present happy condition of the United States.” He did not observe that the successful outcome had effectively ended the first two-party system in the United States. Monroe, a Democrat, had easily won election in 1816 and there was no Federalist candidate to oppose him in 1820.<sup>26</sup>

James Duncan had been recommissioned for his four row offices four times since 1800. As a Democrat he probably looked forward with confidence to at least one more extension of his tenure. If so, he was soon to be disappointed.

In 1820 Joseph Hiester was narrowly elected governor of Pennsylvania, defeating the man who had defeated him three years earlier. Although he was presented to the public as the candidate of the Friends of Reform, most countians must have decided that he was enough of a Federalist to pass muster with them. As three years earlier, 70 percent of the voters chose him.



Between February 2 and 12, 1821 Hiester replaced holders of most of the row offices in more than thirty of the fifty-one counties. On February 8 he relieved James Duncan of his duties, divided the offices, named William McClellan prothonotary and clerk of the courts, and named Jacob Wintrode recorder of deeds and register of wills.<sup>27</sup> The Princeton biographer wrote that Duncan resigned his offices. In fact, he was fired.

On February 21, 1821 the editor of the *Sentinel* chose to comment on the removals by simply quoting from the *Pennsylvania Intelligencer*, a Harrisburg newspaper: “The old governor...has made a fine batch of appointments,” which are “intended to strengthen the administration – and need enough there is of it.”

Since 1818 there had been a second weekly newspaper in Gettysburg. It was the *Compiler*, whose editor, Jacob Lefever, was a Democrat. Noting that James Duncan “was a soldier of the revolution” who recently had “marched to prevent the invasion of Baltimore, although upwards of sixty years of age,” Lefever observed that three governors – McKean, Snyder, and Findlay – had thought highly enough of Duncan’s services to continue him in office. Now, *Compiler* readers had to decide what motivated Hiester “in throwing out of office a man, the most capable, against whom no cause of complaint existed, and whose liberality on public occasions, and for charitable purposes had scarcely bounds – to give place to an inexperienced young man, whose only claim to the office was his having voted for Joseph Hiester.” We do not know, Lefever told his readers, that this “most worthy young man is even the descendant of a revolutionary hero.”<sup>28</sup>

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Having lost his long-held position and the source of his livelihood, James Duncan turned first to an occupation with which he was certainly familiar. He asked the April 1821 term of court to grant him a tavern license. The May 2 issue of the *Sentinel* announced that he had opened “a public house of Entertainment, a few doors north of the Court-house,” for the use of travelers and others. The November 19, 1821 Gettysburg septennial census listed him as an innkeeper. He did not seek

respectfully Shd. that the  
 That your Petitioner has rented the  
 Buck Building in the Dog's Port of  
 the Court house and Borough, where  
 he now dwells – that he is provided  
 with all the necessary things  
 necessary for a public house of  
 Entertainment – and your Petitioner  
 therefore prays your Honor to grant  
 him a license to keep a public house of  
 Entertainment at the place aforesaid.  
 & your Petitioner will pray  
 James Duncan

We the Subscribers do hereby recommend  
 the above Petitioner as a man of a good  
 moral character, suitable to keep a public  
 house of Entertainment & that one good  
 reason for the place above mentioned –  
 Henry Shook  
 John Smith

James Duncan's applied for, and is granted, a tavern license in April 1821.

a renewal in the spring of 1822, when his license expired.<sup>29</sup>

Duncan soon decided to leave Gettysburg and move to Mercer County, where he still owned the 500 acres which the state had granted him in 1786. Before leaving, he had to close out his father's estate, which remained open until the death of his stepmother, Christina Duncan, in 1821. Since the other executor, William Scott, was now in his mid-eighties, the final steps were his major responsibility. The last of his father's real estate holdings were not disposed of until the spring of 1822. Signing himself as the "principal acting executor," he submitted his final account on July 29, 1822. By the time the next Gettysburg tax list was prepared, in November 1822, James Duncan was no longer assessed for an occupation, which is evidence that he was no longer a resident of the borough.<sup>30</sup>

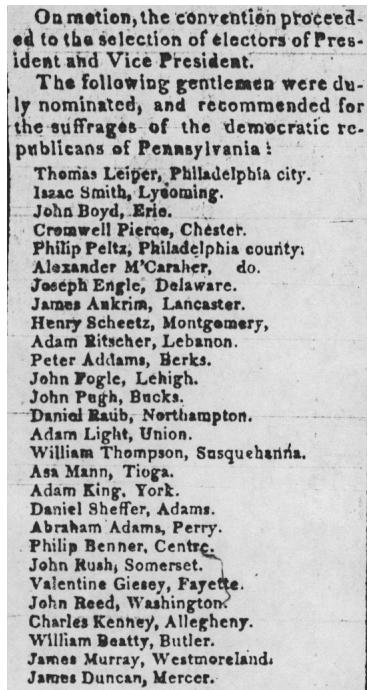
Duncan left Gettysburg without having disposed of all of his real estate there. When he sold one lot in April 1825 and two in May 1826, he was described in the deeds as being a resident of Pymatuning Township, Mercer County. The prices he received for these lots, \$200 or less, all of which he had owned for about a quarter century, suggests that even then there were no buildings on any of them.<sup>31</sup>

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By the time the presidential election of 1824 approached, the national political situation was far different from what it had been just four years earlier. There was no possibility that the voter would again be offered one ticket. As it turned out, there were four from which to choose.

The campaign began as early as March 4, when 125 delegates from Philadelphia County and all eighteen Congressional districts met in Harrisburg to choose "an Electoral Ticket to be supported by the democratic republicans of Pennsylvania." After considerable debate and maneuvering, they decided unanimously to support Andrew Jackson for president and, by a vote of 87 to 37, John C. Calhoun for vice president. They then chose twenty-eight persons, with at least one from each congressional district, who would pledge if elected to support the Jackson-Calhoun ticket. Since none of the twenty-eight was a member of the convention, each had to give a written pledge to support the ticket before it could be announced.

By July all those nominated as electors had complied with the requirement. The man chosen from the Eighteenth Congressional District, which included Erie, Crawford, Mercer, Warren, and Venango counties, was James



*The old soldier, now from Mercer County, is chosen a Jacksonian elector in March 1824*

Duncan. In November the voters of Pennsylvania chose the Jackson ticket over those pledged to Adams, Clay, and Crawford. The old Jeffersonian, James Duncan, cast one of the twenty-eight electoral votes Jackson received from Pennsylvania in 1824.<sup>32</sup>

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In 1828 James Duncan decided to take advantage of an act of Congress approved on May 15 of that year. It offered relief to “certain surviving officers and soldiers of the Army of the Revolution.” Appearing before a justice of the peace on June 28, he declared that he was a captain in Colonel Moses Hazen’s regiment and “served as such to the end of the war,” also that in the 1780s he had received what was known as a commutation certificate, but that he had not “at any time received a pension of the United States, or from Pennsylvania, or from any state.” Once his statements were determined to have been accurate he was awarded an annual pension of \$480, which he received for the rest of his life.<sup>33</sup>

The old soldier soon began selling parts of his grant. In 1828 his son James Jefferson purchased 100 acres. The next year his son John Nicholson acquired 334 acres. The census of 1830 listed him as a head of family, but ten years later the two sons occupy that position in Pymatuning Township. The 1840 census of United States pensioners listed him, 84 years old, living in the household of John Duncan.<sup>34</sup> The old soldier died on June 24, 1844 and was buried in the small graveyard across the road from the house.<sup>35</sup>

On June 28, 1844 John N. Duncan was granted letters of administration on his father’s estate. The inventory which he submitted stated that the deceased “left no other Goods Chattels Rights and Credits” other than accounts and notes entered in his record book. All but four of these were obligations of sons John N. and James J., entered into between 1833 and 1836, possibly when they completed the purchase of real estate from their father. In the inventory no value was assigned to the two shares of stock in the Gettysburg and Petersburg Turnpike Company which James Duncan still retained or to the “fees due to him in Adams County as Prothy etc of the Courts and Register and Recorder.” The last item in the inventory was the pension due the deceased from March 3 to June 24, 1844.<sup>36</sup>

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There are several versions of the life of Adams County James Duncan which differ significantly from the one presented here. According to them, James Duncan was a close, even intimate, friend and adviser of George Washington. He was in fact a member of the general’s staff. Together with his wife, James Duncan socialized with George and Martha Washington in the 1790s in Philadelphia. The women enjoyed sitting together on the porch and knitting.

It was Washington who not only designed the house built for James Duncan in Mercer County, but also gave him ten or eleven slaves to help build it. Some of these slaves were buried in the Duncan graveyard across from the house.

George and Martha are believed to have visited the Duncans in Mercer County. Once again the women sat on the porch knitting while the men planted saplings brought from Mount Vernon. Sometimes the size of the Mercer County land grant is given as 600

acres. In one version it was 640 acres.

Aspiring to be a member of Congress, Duncan ran in 1812, was elected in 1818, and reelected in 1820, soon after which he resigned.

Not all of these versions include everything in this summary, but except where they incorporate material taken from credible sources, such as revolutionary-era documents, they are fiction.<sup>37</sup>

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Unlike Adams County James Duncan, Cumberland County James has not had a biographer, at least none we have found. When we turned to Dickinson College for information on this man, who was a member of its second graduating class in 1788, the archivist could tell us little more than that he was remembered only as a lawyer in Carlisle. When we turned to the Cumberland County Historical Society in Carlisle, we learned that they did not have a biographical sketch of Cumberland James in their Duncan family file, but they invited us to use their large and valuable collection of sources in preparing our own. In 1928 Katherine Duncan Smith published a work entitled *The Story of Thomas Duncan and his Six Sons*. When we learned from it that she knew nothing about Cumberland James, other than that he was a grandson of Thomas, we understood what we needed to do. The task was not made any easier when we found that Cumberland James had one or more local contemporaries with the same name.<sup>38</sup>

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Thomas Duncan, one of the earliest settlers in what became Cumberland County in 1750, was a farmer in Hopewell Township when he made his will in 1776. One of his six sons, named Stephen (1729-1794), settled in Carlisle sometime in the 1750s and became a merchant. His life span coincides almost exactly with that of Seth Duncan (1730-1793). A Presbyterian, Stephen was a trustee of the grammar school in Carlisle from the time of its founding in 1773 until it became part of Dickinson College a decade later. Then he became a trustee of the college and served in that capacity until his death in 1794. One of his sons was a member of the first graduating class in 1787 and another of the second graduating class a year later.<sup>39</sup>

Stephen Duncan was elected to four one-year terms in the Pennsylvania legislature and served in 1778, 1780, 1781, and 1782. He was treasurer of Cumberland County from 1786 to 1789. In 1789 he was one of several persons authorized to raise money to clear the Susquehanna River. Three years later he was a member of a conference which met in Lancaster to propose candidates for the upcoming election for Congressmen and presidential electors.<sup>40</sup>

Stephen and Ann Fox Duncan (1731-1794) were the parents of at least nine children: Thomas, John, Robert, James, Stephen, Mary, Margaret, Lucy, and Ann. Stephen made his will on August 19, 1793. The *Carlisle Klines' Gazette* for April 2, 1794 reported his death on March 30, "after a tedious illness," and described him as "one of the earliest inhabitants of this borough." He was buried in the old Carlisle graveyard. In his will he left 500 pounds to each of his surviving children and to the heirs of a deceased son. He named his wife and sons Thomas, Robert, and James executors, but Ann Duncan died

before the will was probated on January 9, 1795.<sup>41</sup>

Stephen's oldest son, Thomas (1760-1827), studied law in Lancaster under an established lawyer, Jasper Yeates (1745-1817). He was admitted to the Cumberland County bar in 1781, two years before Dickinson College was chartered. He was one of the two leading members of the Cumberland County bar during the next third of a century. From 1790 until 1816 Thomas was a trustee of Dickinson College. In 1817 the governor named him an associate justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, succeeding his old teacher. Duncan died in Philadelphia and was buried in the old Carlisle graveyard where an elaborate tombstone marks his grave.<sup>42</sup>

John (1762-1793) was his father's only son who followed him as a merchant. He married, purchased a brick house on West High Street, and became a father. Whatever promising future he might have had came to a sudden end in June 1793. After differences of opinion with James Lamberton, Duncan challenged him to a duel, in the course of which, in the words of the *Carlisle Gazette* for June 26, 1793, "Duncan unhappily received a ball through his head, which instantly deprived him of life." He was buried in the old Carlisle graveyard. Left with five young children, his widow later married Ephraim Blaine, who was the great-grandfather of James G. Blaine (1830-1893), longtime member of Congress and Republican candidate for president in 1884.<sup>43</sup>

Robert Duncan was born about 1768. He was a member, and valedictorian, of the first graduating class of Dickinson College, in 1787. In October 1791 he was admitted to the Cumberland County bar and began the practice of law in Carlisle.<sup>44</sup> In 1804 he and his brother Thomas purchased half of the Kittanning Manor, about 4,000 acres located in Armstrong County.<sup>45</sup> Robert prepared to open a new chapter in his life by marrying his cousin, Eleanor Duncan, in Carlisle on March 28, 1805 and by then moving to the recently founded town of Kittanning.<sup>46</sup> The new chapter was a very brief one. He died on April 5, 1807, in his 39th year and was buried in the new graveyard in Kittanning. In 1960 the stone was moved into the present Kittanning cemetery.<sup>47</sup>

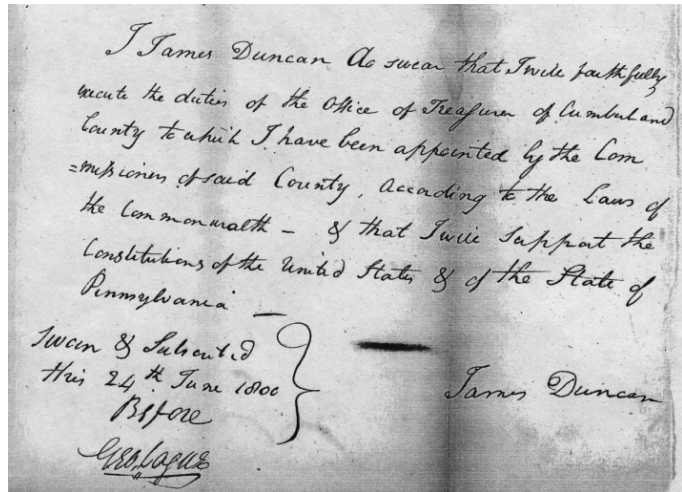
The man we have called Cumberland County James Duncan was probably born about 1769, a year after his brother Robert and about fourteen years after the Adams County James Duncan. He was a member of the second Dickinson College graduating class, receiving his degree along with ten others on May 7, 1788. In April 1792 he was admitted to the Cumberland County bar and became the third Duncan brother to practice law in Carlisle. He was an executor for the estates of his father and his brothers John and Robert, as well as for others. His name appears frequently in Carlisle newspapers as an agent on behalf of his clients.<sup>48</sup>

From 1796 until 1806 he was secretary of the board of trustees of Dickinson College, but was a member of the board only in 1807 and 1808. In 1800 the Cumberland County commissioners named him county treasurer, a position which he occupied for five years. In 1806 he was one of nine persons named managers to enclose the old graveyard with a wall of stone or brick. Especially after 1810 he was heavily assessed for real estate in Carlisle, including houses, town lots, and outlots. In 1811, for example, he owned more than ninety acres in town lots and outlots.<sup>49</sup>



Apparently Cumberland County James Duncan never married. We have found no recorded deed which includes a wife joining him as a grantor. There is a record of Rev. Robert Davidson, minister of the First Presbyterian church in Carlisle, performing the marriage of James Duncan and Margaret Johnston

on December 30, 1788. There is also a record of Rev. Samuel Wilson, minister of the Big Spring Presbyterian church, marrying James Duncan and Mary Ewing on June 5, 1798. In neither case has it been possible to conclude that the groom was Cumberland County James Duncan.<sup>50</sup>



*James Duncan takes the oath as treasurer of Cumberland County, June 24, 1802.*

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In the years after they established themselves as Carlisle lawyers, none of Stephen Duncan's sons appeared to have a desire to emulate their father, who during the difficult years of the revolution had been elected to four one-year terms in the state legislature. None served in either house of the General Assembly after the Constitution of 1790 went into effect. Whatever motivated James Duncan in this regard may have been related to the fact that, in a county which year after year was Democratic, he was, and may always have been, a Federalist.

In the fall of 1812, at the beginning of an unpopular war, James Duncan emerged as his party's candidate for one of the two seats awarded to the Fifth District of Pennsylvania in the United States House of Representatives. The legislature created this district in March 1812, after the 1810 census. It placed Cumberland, Franklin, and Adams counties in the district and awarded it two seats.

As was the custom at the time, a few members of the two parties met in each of the three counties in the district. They discussed desirable candidates and then chose conferees to meet with those from the other counties in the district to present a ticket.<sup>51</sup>

On September 5, 1812 Federalists calling themselves the "Friends of Peace, Union, and Commerce" met in Shippensburg. In a statement to be issued to the public, they declared that "a total incapacity seems to mark every act of the present administration of the country." They called upon voters to decide whether present "miseries are to be entailed upon you and your posterity, or whether from a change of councils you



will look for more wisdom and greater foresight.” Unanimously they nominated Edward Crawford of Franklin County and James Duncan of Cumberland County as their candidates for the House of Representatives.<sup>52</sup>

The Democratic conferees met in Shippensburg one week after their opponents. They apparently adopted no statement, but when the Adams County representatives had met in Gettysburg on September 2 they adopted a series of resolutions commending a state of peace whenever it “can be obtained or preserved, by means consistent with the rights, the honor and safety of the nation.” For six years, they declared, the government has demonstrated its efforts to preserve peace while seeking “to procure redress for wrongs inflicted, by the lawless violence and flagrant injustice of our enemies.” Having failed in these efforts, war became “the only alternative remaining to obtain redress for wrongs hitherto solicited in vain.” Adams County James Duncan was the chairman of this meeting and probably the chief author of the resolutions. The Shippensburg meeting endorsed the district’s two incumbent congressmen for reelection. They were Robert Whitehill of Cumberland County and Dr. William Crawford of Adams County.<sup>53</sup>

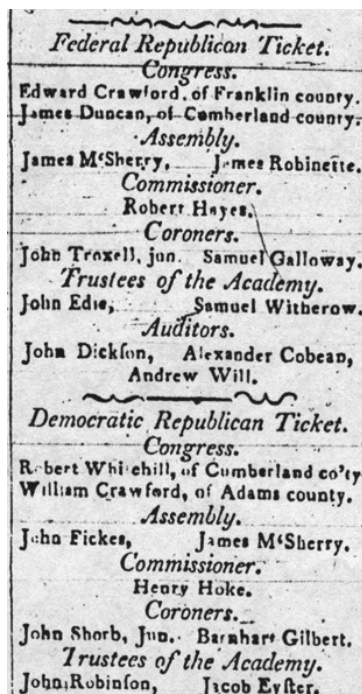
Less than five weeks after the nominating meetings the election was held. There was only a limited amount of time for campaigning.<sup>54</sup>

At the election on October 13, 1812 the two incumbent members of the House of Representatives, both Democrats, won reelection. Robert Whitehill and Dr. William Crawford gained 54.4 percent of the votes. Completely true to form, Adams voted Federalist about 3 to 1. The vote in Cumberland County favored Democrats by about 2 ½ to 1. Cumberland James Duncan did not carry his own county. In the three counties the Democrats polled 4,862 votes and the Federalists 4,065.<sup>55</sup>

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After his 1812 defeat James Duncan returned to his law practice. He continued to be assessed for real estate in the form of houses, town lots, and outlots. In the triennial borough assessments for 1814 and 1817 he had ninety acres in outlots.<sup>56</sup>

Even before his defeat Duncan became interested in banking, which as a Federalist he believed was increasingly necessary for stable economic development, in Cumberland County as well as in the state and nation. Carlisle, he thought, needed a bank. It would provide capital for private and public enterprises in agriculture, commerce and manufacturing; would be responsible for part of the money supply in the form of bank



*The two tickets for the 1812 election in Adams County*

notes; and would receive deposits from the public. People with wealth had long provided an invaluable public service functioning as private bankers, but Federalists believed that the time had come for that role to be played by public institutions, preferably operating under a charter granted by public authority. Most Democrats were strongly opposed to banks, seeing them as dangerous concentrations of wealth and power, prone to excess.<sup>57</sup>

In 1808 the legislature passed a law which recognized “the association of individuals for the purpose of banking,” but made each member “individually and personally liable” for debts their bank incurred. It also prohibited banks incorporated in any other state from establishing “any banking-house or office of discount and deposit” in Pennsylvania. An 1810 law specifically prohibited any unincorporated “association of persons” from performing most of the functions of “an incorporated banking company.”<sup>58</sup>

As early as 1810 a group of Carlisle citizens, probably including James and Thomas Duncan, took most of the steps necessary in organizing a bank, only to conclude that the purpose of the 1810 law was “prohibiting Banking Associations altogether.” They then “unanimously resolved to suspend their operative functions,” but petitioned the legislature to either grant a charter to the Carlisle Bank or pass legislation which would authorize the officers “to resume their Banking functions.”<sup>59</sup>

The laws of 1808 and 1810 were obviously not the definitive words on the subject of banks and banking. In 1813 the legislature narrowly passed a measure authorizing creation of twenty-five chartered banks in all parts of the state. It did not survive the expected veto of Democratic Governor Simon Snyder. “Every objection which can be urged against corporations,” he wrote, “gathers weight and strength when directed against monied institutions; the undue influence of which has often been the subject of well founded complaint.” The legislature tried again the next year. This time the bill survived a second veto and became law on March 21, 1814.<sup>60</sup>

The act of March 21, 1814 divided the state into 27 districts and authorized the chartering of 41 banks. Cumberland County was a district permitted to have two banks, one of which was to be named the Carlisle Bank. The law named commissioners, whose responsibility was to take the necessary steps to prepare the institution for operation. Nine commissioners were named for the Carlisle Bank, including James Duncan (he was the first named) and his brother Thomas.<sup>61</sup>

On May 11, 1814 Governor Snyder issued a charter for the Carlisle Bank. It included the names of 370 persons who had purchased the 6,000 shares of stock which the law authorized. The maximum number of shares anyone purchased was 100. Among the seventeen who purchased that number were James and Thomas Duncan. James also purchased several smaller numbers in his capacity as a trustee or an executor. He became president of the bank and served into the 1820s.<sup>62</sup>

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The congressional campaign of 1820 can be said to have begun in earnest on September 8 of that year, when Democratic conferees from four counties met in Shippensburg and chose Isaiah Graham of Cumberland and James Wilson of Adams County as their candidates. One day later conferees calling themselves the “friends of Reform”

and looking very much like Federalists, also met in Shippensburg and named James McSherry of Adams and James Duncan of Cumberland County as their candidates. As was usually the case, the newspapers did not explain how these four candidates gained party endorsement. Graham and Wilson were newcomers. Duncan had run in 1812 and McSherry in 1814. In the customary brief campaign that followed, neither side issued a statement similar to those eight years before. For the first time since 1808, the congressional election coincided with the choice of a president of the United States and of a governor of Pennsylvania.<sup>63</sup>

For a long time the years of James Monroe's presidency (1817-1825) were described as "an era of good feelings," suggesting that there may then have been few major political issues dividing the country. As far as the national scene was concerned, this may have been true. The Federalists put up no candidate challenging Monroe in 1820. On November 1, 1820 the *Compiler* informed its readers that "on Friday next the citizens of Adams County have an opportunity to show their respect for 'Revolutionary Sufferings and Services'" by supporting the electors who will return the incumbent president and vice president to office. Almost as an afterthought the editor added that "Mr. Monroe was an officer in the Revolutionary Army, and was wounded at the Battle of Trenton, in December, 1776." The editor of the Federalist *Sentinel* confined himself to saying "there will be no opposition in this County to the Democratic Electoral Ticket settled at Lewistown."<sup>64</sup>

The "era of good feelings" did not extend to the race for governor. William Findlay and Joseph Hiester were the two candidates in 1817 and again in 1820. Findlay, a lifelong Democrat, won in 1817 after ten years as state treasurer. Hiester, who was 68 years old in 1820, was completing thirteen years of service in Congress. A Democrat until he broke with Governor Simon Snyder, he may not have been certain of his party affiliation in 1820.<sup>65</sup>

Both defenders and attackers of the two candidates made extensive use of the newspapers. Findlay defenders claimed that the men who were supporting him were the ones who supported Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, as well as Governors McKean and Snyder. Opponents noted that he had recently been impeached (he was acquitted) and accused him of not responding promptly to the current recession, or panic. "Mr. Findlay, as a governor, has had a trial," according to one indictment, he has not accomplished

**Congressional Nomination.**  
At a meeting of the Conferees, appointed by the friends of Reform, held at Shippensburg, on Saturday the 9th of September, for the purpose of nominating two suitable persons to represent this Congressional District:—JAMES M'KEE was called to the Chair, and CHARLES F. KEENER appointed Secretary.

The following gentlemen were present:

From Cumberland county.—William Hammel.  
From Franklin.—Benjamin Reynolds, James M'Kee.  
From Adams.—John Dickson, C. F. Keener.  
Perry—not represented.

**RESOLVED**, that  
**James M'Sherry, Esq.**  
of Adams county, &  
**James Duncan, Esq.**  
of Cumberland county,  
be recommended to the support of our fellow-citizens, as fit and suitable persons to represent this District in Congress.

**JAMES M'KEE, Chairman.**  
**C. F. KEENER, Sec'y.**

*The choice of the friends of  
Reform for the Fifth Congressional  
District of Pennsylvania,  
September 9, 1820*

a single salutary object, but has frustrated many.” Defenders of Hiester praised him for his military service, beginning in 1776, and for the public service which followed. To answer critics who charged him with changing his mind on important issues, they cited Adams, Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe as examples of the good company of mindchangers in which he found himself. In a letter to the *Compiler*, an unidentified writer told the Democratic citizens in Adams County that certain statewide “factions and fragments of factions” are soliciting “your votes for a superannuated man, notoriously destitute of those talents essentially requisite to qualify a man for the chief magistracy of a great and flourishing state.”<sup>66</sup>

The campaign for the two seats in Congress was waged with much less intensity than the one for the governorship, but even here a reader who examined the Carlisle *American Volunteer* for October 5, 1820 might have expected the unfolding of a scandal. The newspaper printed “a true copy” of a docket entry in the Adams County case of the Commonwealth vs. James Wilson. In 1802 Wilson, now the Democratic candidate for Congress, had been accused of adultery. He was tried and acquitted. Someone signing himself a Democrat sent this information to the paper, not to question Wilson’s fitness for the office, but to attest to his “moral character,” which in Adams County, he stated, needed no vindication. The docket copy was prepared on behalf of the Adams County clerk of courts, who was the Adams County James Duncan.<sup>67</sup>

In a society still highly suspicious of banks and banking, one would expect these institutions and their officers to become an issue in the election of 1820. An article in the *Compiler* charged that every opponent of the recent war who happened to be in the legislature had voted for the bank law. This included James McSherry who, in the opinion of the writer, could have prevented its passage if he had voted against it. Now, McSherry, after “actually bringing ruin upon society,” was asking to be sent to Congress. Another article in the same paper claimed that both Federalist candidates, by virtue of their association with banks, “had forfeited their claim to public support.”<sup>68</sup>

On September 14, the *American Volunteer* published an unsigned statement, without comment, under the heading Communications:

James Duncan, esq, president of the Carlisle Bank, is up as a candidate for Congress. Will he be elected is the question. He may be, but from present appearances, his election does not come within the bounds of probability, nay, we think it impossible for him to succeed. Never have we seen a man sink so much in public estimation, as Mr. Duncan has done, within these two years past. He is totally abandoned by many of his former political friends, the federalists-

Among the democrats, he has not a friend, nor will he receive half of the oldschool votes- The only support he can expect to receive is from the fag end of a faction, as Thompson-Brown calls them. How then is it possible for Mr. Duncan to be elected?

On its face this statement appears to defy explanation: Why had many of his old Federalist friends abandoned Duncan? Had they? In his political life, did he ever have

many Democratic friends? The Old School Federal Ticket Consisted of McSherry and Duncan. This statement bears rereading when the election returns are discussed.<sup>69</sup>

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The gubernatorial and congressional elections occurred on October 10, 1820.

By a vote of 67,905 to 66,300 Joseph Hiester was chosen governor. The total vote was about 7 percent larger than it had been three years earlier. In the counties comprising the Fifth Congressional District, the increase was about 1 percent.<sup>70</sup>

This was in stark contrast to what happened to the vote for Congress in the fifth district. The total vote, which had declined in each of the four previous elections (1812-1818), increased by 71 percent over that in 1818, reaching 12,813. Most dramatic was the increase in the Federalist vote in all four counties, jumping from 3,035 in 1818 to 6,926 two years later. The Federalists carried the district for the first time since it had been created in 1812.<sup>71</sup>

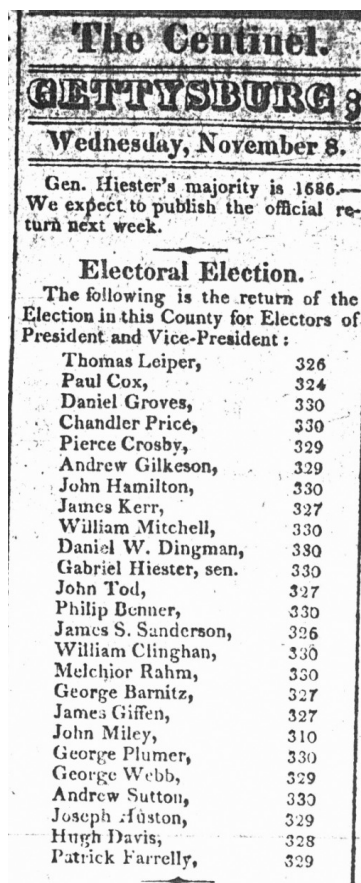
James McSherry and James Duncan won the election, polling 6,926 votes to 5,887 for the Democratic candidates. In his home county as well as in Cumberland, McSherry ran ahead of Duncan. Together, the two men received two-and-one half times the votes polled for Federalists candidates in Cumberland County two years earlier.<sup>72</sup>

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At this time the vote for presidential electors was held several weeks after the state and local elections. On November 3, 1820, when the voters of Adams County went to the polls they were offered one ticket, with the names of twenty-five persons, all of them pledged to vote for Monroe and Tompkins. The number of votes cast for each elector separately ranged from 310 to 330. Since eleven votes were cast for all names on the ticket, we can conclude that 330 Adams County voters participated in this presidential election. It was by far the smallest number of votes cast for presidential electors in the history of Adams County.

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In the absence of exit polls, editors in the Fifth Congressional District could not ask voters why they had turned out in such record numbers to choose their congressman,



<b>The Centinel.</b>	
<b>GETTYSBURG</b>	
<b>Wednesday, November 8.</b>	
Gen. Hiester's majority is 1686.— We expect to publish the official return next week.	
<b>Electoral Election.</b>	
The following is the return of the Election in this County for Electors of President and Vice-President :	
Thomas Leiper,	326
Paul Cox,	324
Daniel Groves,	330
Chandler Price,	330
Pierce Crosby,	329
Andrew Gilkeson,	329
John Hamilton,	330
James Kerr,	327
William Mitchell,	330
Daniel W. Dingman,	330
Gabriel Hiester, sen.	330
John Tod,	327
Philip Benner,	330
James S. Sanderson,	326
William Clinghan,	330
Melchior Rahm,	330
George Barnitz,	327
James Giffen,	327
John Miley,	310
George Plumer,	330
George Webb,	329
Andrew Sutton,	330
Joseph Huston,	329
Hugh Davis,	328
Patrick Farrelly,	329

*The vote cast by the one and only ticket of the Presidential election in Adams County in November 1820. In no election before or since have so few votes been cast.*



why so many of them had cast Federalist ballots, and what had motivated them to vote the way they did. In some cases the responses to these three questions may have merged into one. What applied to voter behavior in the fifth district may not have applied in the vote for governor.

Probably reacting to both elections, the editor of the *Carlisle American Volunteer*, in his October 13 issue, concluded that “the election in this district, was contested with more warmth than, perhaps, on any former occasion.” He then proceeded to accuse the Federalists of having employed “means the most unprincipled” to achieve their ends. These included duping some voters by handing them false tickets and plying others with intoxicants before bringing them to the polls, where they were “wheeled out of the expression of their sentiments.” In his issue of October 13, the editor of the *Compiler* charged that, while some Adams countians had done their duty, others resorted to “base or despicable” tricks similar to those found in Cumberland County.<sup>73</sup>

Unfortunately, the appropriate issue of the Federalist *Sentinel* is missing from the files, but the editor of this paper had already expressed his opinion of the contemporary political situation. He opposed the “acrimonious spirit of controversy, both in private conversation, and public circles,” especially as it applied to “the present controversy between the Federalists of this county.” As an editor, he took “no particular side.”<sup>74</sup>

In his evaluation of the campaign and election of 1820, Philip S. Klein noted that, in the race for governor, the two sides were equal in throwing mud at each other. He believed that it was the panic which “probably swung the delicate balance” in the race for governor. Although editors in Carlisle and Gettysburg did not mention this as a factor, the long list of sheriff sales in the pages of their papers demonstrated to everyone that another in the long and painful series of economic downturns was occurring.<sup>75</sup>

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Having won a Congressional seat on his second try, James Duncan was nevertheless not disinclined to accept a quite different opportunity when the occasion presented itself. On April 21, 1821, Governor Joseph Hiester received the resignation of George Bryan as auditor general of the state and nominated Duncan to succeed him. A month later the governor recommissioned him for a three-year term. Since Congress was not going to be meeting until December 3, 1821, Duncan resigned his seat before he ever occupied it.<sup>76</sup>

Jacob Lefever, editor of the Gettysburg *Compiler*, was no friend of Governor Hiester, who had recently turned out of office his Gettysburg friend and associate, Adams County James Duncan. In his May 2 edition Lefever used two articles taken from other papers to identify the new auditor general as “one of the most violent federal lawyers in the state.” After Oliver H. Perry’s victory on Lake Erie in September 1813, one of the articles charged, Duncan “refused to illuminate his windows, when every house in town but his own was illuminated.” According to the other article, Duncan had recently become a close friend of the governor and, while attempting to obtain a county row position for one of his political associates, “cast a wishful look to the office of Auditor General.” Before long he was “in possession of the second most important office within the gift of the Governor.” Neither of the articles offered any proof of the charges made. Readers



of the Compiler were left to determine whether they were true.<sup>77</sup>

James Duncan continued to serve as auditor general until his term expired in the spring of 1824. When Dickinson College resumed operations after a break of five years, Duncan and Secretary of the Commonwealth Andrew Gregg represented the state at commencement exercises on June 26, 1822.<sup>78</sup>

Duncan returned to Carlisle and within a few years began to dispose of his real estate. In September 1826 he sold a valuable tavern in Carlisle and about 470 acres of land in Southampton Township to his brother Thomas. The triennial assessment of 1829 assessed him for nothing more than a half lot and an old barn in Carlisle. His name does not appear in either of the next two triennial assessments.<sup>79</sup>

In the introduction to an essay which Duncan wrote about 1800 and which was published in the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* in 1881, the editor of that journal wrote that “Mr. Duncan removed to Texas, where he died.” We have found nothing more about his later years.<sup>80</sup>

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At the beginning of this investigation, we asked the real James Duncan to please stand up. At its end, it is evident that we have been concerned with two James Duncans, living for many years in adjoining counties, one a Democrat and one a Federalist, and both with careers meriting study with care and accuracy. Only a minimum of care and accuracy are required to establish that one James Duncan ran for Congress while the other did not.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Richard A. Harrison, *Princetonians, 1769-1775: A Biographical Dictionary* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1980), 47-9. Hereafter cited as Harrison. The claim that Adams County James Duncan was a candidate for Congress in 1812 and 1820 has been repeated in successive editions of the *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, published by the Government Printing Office.

<sup>2</sup>John R. McGrew, compiler, *Index of Tavern Licenses Allowed by York County, Pennsylvania: 1749-1806* Special Publication 48 (York: South Central Genealogical Society, 1992), 12. Applicants petitioned the court of quarter sessions to recommend them to the governor, who actually issued the licenses. The court was not in session in 1776-1777. Recommendations for 1792-1794 were not entered in the docket. The last recommendation for Seth Duncan was in 1791.

<sup>3</sup>Ann Duncan died Oct. 27, 1777, age 45, and was buried in the graveyard of Emanuel Reformed, now United Church of Christ, church in Abbottstown. 1783 Berwick twp. tax list, copy in the Adams County Historical Society. Later references to tax lists are taken from the same source. Hereafter cited as ACHS.

<sup>4</sup>His last known tavern license expired in July 1792. The original papers in his estate are in the York County Archives. Copies are available in ACHS. They include the will, inventory of personal property, executors' accounts, and orphans court proceedings. In the Berwick township tax lists for 1779, 1781, and 1788, Seth was assessed for one "negro," but there is no record of ownership of a slave in the estate papers.

<sup>5</sup>Seth's tombstone reads simply that he died on August 3, 1793, age 63 years. The account filed on August 13, 1810 records a payment to Rev. Joseph Henderson, evidently for conducting the funeral.

<sup>6</sup>All of this information has been drawn from the estate papers.

<sup>7</sup>Harrison, 47.

<sup>8</sup>Memorial of Col. Moses Hazen to General George Washington, Nov. 30, 1779, in *Pennsylvania Archives*, First Series, Volume 8, 17-20.

<sup>9</sup>The basic facts of his military career are given in Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register of Officers of the Continental Army during the War of the Revolution, April, 1775 to December, 1783*, new, revised, and enlarged edition (Baltimore, 1973), 206. Heitman also gives the basic facts on a Pennsylvania volunteer and officer named Matthew Duncan, probably the brother of James. See 206-7.

<sup>10</sup>The diary was published in the *Pennsylvania Archives*, Second Series, Volume 15, 745-52.

<sup>11</sup>General George Washington to Brigadier General Moses Hazen, Dec. 9, 1782, in John C. Fitzpatrick, editor, *The Writings of George Washington...* (Washington, 1931-44) 25:409.

<sup>12</sup>John Dwight Kilbourne, *Virtutis Praemium: The Men Who Founded the State Society of the Cincinnati of Pennsylvania*, 2 vols. (Rockport, Maine, 1998) 1:370-3. Duncan was also a member of the Society of the Cincinnati in Pennsylvania and served it briefly as an officer.

<sup>13</sup>The grant was recorded on November 20, 1905 in the Mercer County Deed Book C-8, 579.

<sup>14</sup>The 1788 tax list was probably prepared in the fall of the preceding year. The record of the marriage appears in *Pennsylvania Archives*, Second Series, Volume 9, 584.

<sup>15</sup>Records of Appointment of Postmasters, 1789-1818. Records of the Post Office Department, Record Group 28, 10, microfilm in the ACHS. Appointed second postmaster of Abbottstown in 1797, he served for three years. Hereafter cited as Appointments of Postmasters.

<sup>16</sup>Sanford W. Higginbotham, *The Keystone in the Democratic Arch: Pennsylvania Politics, 1800-1816* (Harrisburg, 1952) discusses the political situation in the state during much of Duncan's tenure in office.

<sup>17</sup>The Princeton biographer stated that Duncan was named prothonotary in 1801 and held the other row offices by virtue of that appointment. This was not the case. Records of his first acts are in the collections of the ACHS.

<sup>18</sup>For the recommissions, see *Pennsylvania Archives*, Eighth Series, Volume 3, 1851; Vol. 4, 2691 and 3119; and Volume 6, 4316.

<sup>19</sup>Census returns on microfilm are available at the ACHS. Duncan purchased lots in Gettysburg in 1802, 1803, and 1810. Adams County Deed Book D, 249 and 253 and L, 390. For the 1819 residence, see the *Sentinel* for Jan. 13, 1819. First published in Nov. 1800, this newspaper was called the *Centinel* until Feb. 8, 1826 when it became the *Sentinel*. The latter is the spelling used here. Copies of the *Sentinel* and the *Compiler*, which began in 1818, are available on microfilm at ACHS.

<sup>20</sup>For the reference to the proposed 1800 school, see the *1886 History of Adams County Pennsylvania...* reprinted 1992 by the Adams County Historical Society, 246-7.

<sup>21</sup>On Nov. 2, 1910 Mary Duncan Pierce, who was a granddaughter of John Nicholson Duncan and a great-granddaughter of James Duncan, was accepted as a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Not all of the information she submitted to that organization was correct, but the exact dates of birth which she gave for the three Duncan children may have been based on a family record to which she had access and may be accurate: John Nicholson, Feb. 16, 1796; Juliana, Mar. 1, 1800; and James Jefferson, Dec. 18, 1801. Application 82065, National Society Daughters of the American Revolution. Juliana married John R. Thornton in Gettysburg on December 5, 1820 and died at Greenville, Mercer County, on June 29, 1836, "aged about 36 years." James Jefferson married Louise Clark in Mercer County on September 1, 1825. Both John Nicholson and Juliana are buried in the family graveyard in Pymatuning twp., Mercer County. *Compiler*, Dec. 13, 1820; July 26, 1836; and Sept. 7, 1825. The *Sentinel* for Oct. 26, 1808 reported the death on the preceding Oct. 10 at Princeton, New Jersey, of Miss Susan W. Duncan, "late of Gettysburg." Since the lengthy obituary ends with the statement that her parents "had but one, one darling child," she could not have a daughter of this James Duncan.

<sup>22</sup>The *Compiler* for Mar. 30, 1825 reported the marriage at New Berlin, Penna., fifteen days earlier, of James Duncan, a merchant of Aaronsburg, Centre County, and Mrs. Sophia Maxwell, of Gettysburg. She was the widow of William Maxwell, a Gettysburg attorney who died in 1816. The groom had been postmaster of Aaronsburg for many years. Appointment of Postmasters, 10.

<sup>23</sup>Both of these meetings were reported in what was then Gettysburg's only newspaper, *Sentinel*, on July 6, 1814. There is no mention at this point of Adams County James Duncan's campaign for Congress in 1812, became neither then nor in 1820 was he a candidate for a seat in Congress.

<sup>24</sup>The list which First Lieutenant George Smyser kept for many years and then made available for publication appeared in the *Compiler* on Dec. 30, 1850. The first of a number of calls to members of the corps to appear and receive compensation was published in the *Sentinel* on Sept. 28, 1814.

<sup>25</sup>*Sentinel*, Sept. 14, 1814.

<sup>26</sup>Philip Shriver Klein, *Pennsylvania Politics, 1817-1832: A Game Without Rules* (Philadelphia, 1940), 75-149, explains the setting in which the elections of 1817 and 1820 occurred. Hereafter cited as Klein.

<sup>27</sup>The list of counties affected by Hiester's action was reprinted in the *Sentinel* for Feb. 21, 1821. The name of the new register and recorder for Adams County is given as Winrott, but Winterode is the more common spelling.

<sup>28</sup>*Compiler*, Feb. 21, 1821. Editors often included in their weekly columns stories taken from other newspapers. Rarely if ever did these borrowings not reflect their own views.

<sup>29</sup>Gettysburg septennial census list for 1821, ACHS.

<sup>30</sup>Christina Duncan died on Sept. 25, 1821, age 72 years. She was buried not with her husband, but in the Lutheran graveyard in Abbottstown. Seth Duncan estate papers.

<sup>31</sup>The deeds by which Duncan transferred his Gettysburg real estate were recorded in Adams County Deed Books L, 84; M, 1, and L, 390. In none was he joined by a wife; he was a widower.

<sup>32</sup>*Compiler*, March 10 and 17, July 28, and Nov. 24, 1824.

<sup>33</sup>Pension papers, James Duncan, file number S 4718, National Archives and Records. The complete pension file consists of only four pages.

<sup>34</sup>Mercer County Deed Books M-1, 246 and 248 and S-1, 53. *A Census of Pensioners for Revolutionary or Military Services...* prepared by the Genealogical Society of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Baltimore, 1974), 124.

<sup>35</sup>The date of James Duncan's death is clearly June 24, 1844, not June 21. The deaths of former Adams countians were often noted in later Gettysburg newspapers. This was true in the case of the wife and daughter of James Duncan, but not in his case. There are tombstones for James, John N., and Juliana in the family cemetery, but not all of the dates given for them are correct. Mercer County Cemetery Inscriptions, copied by Sally Dufford and Loretta DeSantis, in cooperation with the Mercer County Genealogical Society, Volume 11 (1984), 97. Copy in the Mercer County Historical Society.

<sup>36</sup>Estate Papers for James Duncan, consisting of an administration bond and inventory only, from the Mercer County Register of Wills.

<sup>37</sup>An example of another version of the life of Adams County James is in an article titled "James Duncan, County Settler, Was Friend to Geo. Washington," in the Sharon, PA, *Herald*, Feb. 22, 1956. The other versions overlook almost entirely his life in what is now Adams County.

<sup>38</sup>Katherine Duncan Smith, *The Story of Thomas Duncan and His Six Sons* (New York, 1928), 41. Hereafter cited as Smith.

<sup>39</sup>Will of Thomas Duncan, Cumberland County Will Book B, 211. Charles Coleman Sellers, *Dickinson College: A History* (Middletown, Connecticut, 1973), 481, 483. Hereafter cited as Sellers.

<sup>40</sup>*Pennsylvania Manual*, 88 (1947-8): 504; *Carlisle Gazette*, Jan. 21, 1786; *Pennsylvania Herald and York General Advertiser*, Nov. 11, 1789 and Sept. 26, 1792.

<sup>41</sup>Will of Stephen Duncan, Cumberland County Will Book E, 337. The Duncan family tombstone inscriptions are available in Sarah Woods Parkinson, *Memories of Carlisle's Old Graveyard* (Carlisle, 1930), 94-5. Hereafter cited as Parkinson. The Carlisle tax lists for 1778-1782 assess Stephen Duncan for one or two slaves. *Pennsylvania Archives*, Third Series, Volume 20; 21, 134, 267, 404, and 548.

<sup>42</sup>For a brief summary of his career, see Smith, 42.

- <sup>43</sup>Conway P. Wing, *History of Cumberland County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1879), 117, gives more details of the duel and its sequel. Hereafter cited as Wing.
- <sup>44</sup>Sellers, 115-6. Cumberland County, Office of the Prothonotary, Appearance Docket, 1790-3, October term 1791, in the Cumberland County Historical Society. Hereafter cited a CCHS.
- <sup>45</sup>While they were still proprietors of Pennsylvania, the Penns established about eighty manors in all parts of the province, which they were permitted to retain after the revolution. One of these manors was surveyed in 1769 and given the name Kittanning. The survey described it as consisting of 3,960 acres. It was located on the east side of the Allegheny River about thirty-five miles above Fort Pitt. Thomas and Robert Duncan purchased half of the manor in June 1804. Robert Walter Smith, *History of Armstrong County, Pennsylvania* (Chicago, 1883), 310-2.
- <sup>46</sup>*Cumberland County, PA, marriages, 1761-1817*, compiled by Susan Penrod (Laughlintown, Pennsylvania: Southwest Pennsylvania Genealogical Society, 1983). number 283. Hereafter cited as Cumberland County marriages.
- <sup>47</sup>*Burials in the Kittanning Cemetery, Kittanning, Pennsylvania, 1811-1995*, compiled by Allen R. and Marla K. Mechling, 137. Copy in the Armstrong County Historical Museum and Genealogical Society. Thomas Duncan retained his interest in the manor until his death in 1827. Eleanor Duncan and her only child, Mary Frances, sold theirs in the 1830s and returned to Carlisle. Eleanor died in Harrisburg in 1862. She was buried in the Old Carlisle graveyard. Parkinson, 94.
- <sup>48</sup>The *Carlisle Gazette* reported his graduation in its issue of May 14, 1788. Three years later he was awarded a master's degree which was long the customary practice. *Carlisle Gazette*, May 9, 1792. Cumberland County, Office of the Prothonotary, Appearance Docket, 1790-3, April term 1792, In CCHS.
- <sup>49</sup>Years of service with the college board of trustees from the Dickinson College Archives. Tenure as County treasurer and manager to enclose the graveyard from Wing, 117, 122. Real estate holdings from tax lists in CCHS.
- <sup>50</sup>Cumberland County marriages, numbers 276 and 277. The author of a sketch of Dr. David Nelson Mahon (1797/8-1876), an 1815 Dickinson College graduate, stated that he was "brought up partly in the family of his uncle, James Duncan, Esq., of Carlisle." Wing, 188. Mahon was the son of Duncan's sister, Ann Duncan Mahon.
- <sup>51</sup>The term representatives was sometimes used to describe those who attended the meetings in each County. Conferees were those who attended the district meetings at which candidates were selected.
- <sup>52</sup>*Carlisle Herald*, Sept. 11, 1812; *Sentinel*, Sept. 9, 1812. The act of March 20, 1812, which created the district, required the election judges in each County to prepare "one general and true return of the whole district" in Shippensburg.
- <sup>53</sup>*Sentinel*, Sept. 16, 1812, Sept. 9, 1812. At the Sept. 2 meeting of Adams County Democrats, James Duncan was one of three elected "a standing corresponding committee" for the County. Robert Whitehill was first elected to Congress in 1805 and William Crawford in 1808.
- <sup>54</sup>The tickets announced in the papers in September and early October were identified as the Federal Republican (not the Friends of Peace, Union, and Commerce) and the Democratic Republicans. The home counties of the four Congressional candidates were given. No one should ever have confused James Duncan, the candidate from Cumberland County, with the James Duncan from Adams.

<sup>55</sup>*Sentinel*, Oct. 21, 1812; Chambersburg *Franklin Repository*, Oct. 20, 1812. In the 1812 and 1820 Congressional elections in this district, voters were choosing two members, not one. They rarely cast the same number of votes for both. We have reported the higher number in each case.

<sup>56</sup>Tax lists in the CCHS.

<sup>57</sup>The first United States Bank, chartered for twenty years in 1791, provided the country with a considerable measure of financial stability, especially regarding the currency. When the charter for this bank was allowed to lapse in 1811, there were fewer than 100 state banks in the United States.

<sup>58</sup>Acts of Mar. 28, 1808; Mar. 19, 1810; and Mar. 20, 1810.

<sup>59</sup>The Memorial and Petition of the Subscribers, Freemen of the County of Cumberland to the General Assembly of Pennsylvania, undated, but 1811 or 1812. CCHS Manuscript Collection Box 16, folder 12.

<sup>60</sup>For the text of Snyder's veto, see the *Pennsylvania Archives*, Ninth Series, Volume 5, 3324-7.

<sup>61</sup>Described as "an Act regulating Banks," it was enacted "for the purpose of establishing banking institutions." It did provide what has been called a general banking system for Pennsylvania. The governor was authorized to issue a charter for banks named in the act; separate laws were no longer needed for each. Charters were not perpetual; those of banks chartered under this act would expire on April 1, 1825. Fourteen "fundamental articles" were to be followed in operating them.

<sup>62</sup>The text of the charter for the Carlisle Bank is in the *Pennsylvania Archives*, Ninth Series, Volume 5, 3544-54. Neither in the act of Mar. 21, 1814 nor in the charter is it called anything other than the Carlisle Bank. The Bank of Gettysburg was chartered on April 29, 1814 and the Bank of Chambersburg on May 13, 1814. *Pennsylvania Archives*, Ninth Series, Volume 5, 3511-15 and 3555-62. The record shows that Adams County James Duncan purchased one share of stock in the Bank of Gettysburg. *History of the Bank of Gettysburg 1814-1864, The Gettysburg National Bank 1864-1914*, compiled by William McSherry (Gettysburg, 1914), 15.

<sup>63</sup>There were four counties in the Fifth Congressional District in 1820. Perry was created from Cumberland County by an act of March 22, 1820, which made it a part of this district. Since Congressman David Fullerton resigned his seat on May 15, 1820, there were three seats to be filled in October. Our concern here is with the contest of the two for the full term.

<sup>64</sup>See the *Compiler* and *Sentinel* for Nov. 1, 1820. A Democratic convention which met in Lewistown in March 1820 chose the electors to vote for Monroe and Tompkins in the fall. Klein, 105.

<sup>65</sup>For a review of parties and party labels in the Fifth Congressional District during this period, see Table 1.

<sup>66</sup>In the *Sentinel* for Sept. 20 and 27, 1820, the editor published the "Address of the Republican Convention, which assembled at Carlisle, on the 4th day of March, 1820, to the Freemen of Pennsylvania." This was the convention which nominated Joseph Hiester for governor.

<sup>67</sup>*Carlisle American Volunteer*, Oct. 5, 1820.

<sup>68</sup>*Compiler*, Oct. 4, 1820.

<sup>69</sup>The *Carlisle American Volunteer* for Sept. 14, 1820 described Duncan and McSherry as the Old School Federal Ticket for Congress.

<sup>70</sup>Klein, 406-8



<sup>71</sup>The vote had declined from 8,927 in 1812 to 8,287 in 1814, to 7,728 in 1816, and to 7,497 in 1818. For a record of the voting in each County by party during congressional elections between 1812 and 1820, see Table 2.

<sup>72</sup>The Federalist vote in Cumberland County increased from 1,003 in 1818 to 2,566 in 1820. See Table 2.

<sup>73</sup>*Carlisle American Volunteer*, Oct. 13, 1820. *Compiler*, Oct. 18, 1820. At this time there were no ballots provided by the government. Parties provided tickets which voters deposited in the ballot box.

<sup>74</sup>*Sentinel*, Sept. 13, 1820.

<sup>75</sup>Klein, 107-9.

<sup>76</sup>*Pennsylvania Archives*, Ninth Series, Volume 7, 5487-5498.

<sup>77</sup>*Compiler*, May 2, 1821. The article taken from the Easton *Centinel* appealed “to the people of Carlisle for the truth of what we assert in relation to James Duncan.” As far as the readers of the *Compiler* were concerned, in the several months after May 2 they were treated to more criticism of the governor but not to any light on the behavior of the auditor general.

<sup>78</sup>Sellers, 69.

<sup>79</sup>Cumberland County Deed Book I-KK, 68 and 69. Tax lists for 1829, 1832, and 1835, CCHS.

<sup>80</sup>James Duncan, “A Reminiscence of Doctor Charles Nesbit of Dickinson College,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 5 (Jan. 1881): 102-5. In his introduction, the editor stated that he had “lately received” the Duncan manuscript, but did not identify from whom. He referred to Duncan as auditor general of the state (1821-1824) and brother of Judge Thomas Duncan. The essay pays high tribute to Dr. Charles Nesbit, who was president of Dickinson College from 1785 until his death in 1804. Duncan makes no mention of his experience either as a student or an officer of Dickinson College. He did state that “no less than 153” students had been graduated by the time of his writing, which places the date of its composition in or about 1798.

## **A Note on the Sources**

This investigation rests on the use of information available in the newspapers and public records, such as tax lists, recorded deeds, and estate papers. We have relied heavily on two Gettysburg newspapers available on Microfilm at the Adams County Historical Society.

We were prompted to undertake this investigation in responding to an inquiry in 2007 from Christy Hunter Hall, Mercer County Historical Society. In her efforts to determine the accuracy of certain statements about James Duncan in Mercer County, she asked whether he had a large dwelling house and slaves while in Adams County. As we have broadened the scope of our investigation, she has provided us with a variety of primary and secondary sources available to the Mercer County Society.

The staff of the Cumberland County Historical Society has been most generous in providing us with copies of both primary and secondary sources for the life of Cumberland County James. Their contribution warrants our almost listing them as coauthors of this effort, something which on second thought we are not sure they would agree with. From the Cumberland County Historical Society we thank Mary Jane Russelburg and Rob Schwartz and Barb Bartos from the Cumberland County Archives Project.

Among others whose assistance deserves special mention are Dickinson College Archives, Malinda Triller, Special Collections Librarian; Armstrong County Historical Museum and Genealogical Society, Kathy Marcinek; Adams County Historical Society, Robert Cluck, Research Assistant; and Jonathan R. Strayer, Head, Reference Section, Pennsylvania State Archives.

All Images come from the collections of the Adams County Historical Society except the image of the Cumberland County Treasurer's oath which comes from the Cumberland County Historical Society.

**Table 1**  
**Party Labels during the Fifth District Congressional Campaigns**  
**1812-1820**

Year	Democrats	Federalists
1812	Democratic Republicans	Friends of Peace, Commerce and Union
1814	Democratic Republicans	Federal Republicans
1816	Democratic Republicans	Federalists
1818	Democratic Republicans Democrats	Federal Republicans Federal
1820	Democratic Republicans Democrats	Friends of Reform Federal Republicans Old School Federal Federal Delegate

**Source:** Gettysburg and Carlisle Newspapers

**Table 2**  
**Fifth Congressional District Votes**  
**1812-1820**

	1812	1812	1814	1814	1816	1816	1818	1818	1820	1820
Party	D	F	D	F	D	F	D	F	D	F
Adams	531	1560	352	1369	367	910	733	1098	818	1997
Cumberland	2553	1110	2286	986	3036	859	2183	1003	2882	2566
Franklin	1778	1395	1788	1506	1310	1246	1546	934	2187	2363
Party Total	4862	4065	4426	3861	4713	3015	4462	3035	5887	6926
Total Vote	8927		8287		7728		7497			12813

**D for Democratic and F for Federal Vote**

**Sources:** *Gettysburg Sentinel*, Oct. 12, 1812, Oct. 19, 1814, Oct. 23, 1816, Oct. 21, 1818

*Chambersburg Franklin Repository*, Oct. 20, 1812

*Carlisle American Volunteer*, Oct. 20, 1814

*Gettysburg Compiler* Oct. 25, 1820

The total given is the number of votes cast for the higher candidate in each case. Votes for candidates to fill vacancies and for non-endorsed candidates not included. The votes in Perry County for 1820 are included in those for Cumberland.