
Volume 38
Issue 3 *Dickinson Law Review* - Volume 38,
1933-1934

4-1-1934

Honorable John Reed

Merkel Landis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ideas.dickinsonlaw.psu.edu/dlra>

Recommended Citation

Merkel Landis, *Honorable John Reed*, 38 DICK. L. REV. 161 (1934).
Available at: <https://ideas.dickinsonlaw.psu.edu/dlra/vol38/iss3/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Law Reviews at Dickinson Law IDEAS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dickinson Law Review by an authorized editor of Dickinson Law IDEAS. For more information, please contact lja10@psu.edu.

HON. JOHN REED

*MERKEL LANDIS

John Reed was born in 1786 in what was then York, but what is now Adams County, Pennsylvania. He was the son of General William Reed of Revolutionary fame.

He attended Dickinson College, graduating with the class of 1806. He became a student of law under the direction of William Maxwell, Esq., of Gettysburg and in 1809 was admitted to the Bar. He removed to Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania where he commenced the practice of his profession. In 1815 he was elected to the State Senate and three years later performed the duties of Deputy Attorney General of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

On the 10th day of July, 1820 he was commissioned by the then Governor Findlay, President Judge of the Ninth Judicial District, then composed of the present counties of Cumberland, Franklin, Adams and Perry.

The American Volunteer, a paper published in Carlisle, in their edition of July 20th, 1820 states that "On July 10th, 1820 John Reed of Westmoreland County was appointed in the room of Charles Smith, resigned, and that this appointment will do honor to Wm. Findlay and to the bench. He will be found to possess energy and firmness, acuteness of perception, and sufficient legal acquirements to decide promptly."

This same paper in a subsequent edition states that "No sooner is the appointment of Judge Reed announced than both he and the Governor are attacked by the fault finding 'junior' editor of the misnamed Carlisle Republican. This is what we anticipated knowing that the Governor could not appoint any man whatsoever to this station with whom the grumbletonians would appear to be satisfied. It is acknowledged by both Federalists and Democrats that Mr. Reed is a gentleman of correct deportment, strict integrity and indefatigable industry."

After residing in Carlisle twelve years he purchased from James Noble for Six Hundred Dollars the Southwest corner of West High and South West Streets, the lot being 240 feet square. This lot at present comprises the land on which now stand the Methodist Episcopal Church, the President's Residence of Dickinson College, the Phi Kappa Psi Fraternity Chapter House and the Methodist Church Parsonage. It was on this lot that Judge Reed built a handsome residence in which he lived until the time of his death in 1850.

*Dickinson College, A.B., 1896; M.A., 1899; Dickinson Law School, LL.B., 1899; Member of the Cumberland County Bar Association, and the Hamilton Library and Historical Association.

This house after extensive and so-called improvements is now the "White House" of Dickinson College.

Judge Reed doubtless took an active part in the life of the town. In 1833 he presided at a meeting of the citizens of the town convened for "the purpose of expressing their approbation of the measures which have been lately adopted in relation to the resuscitation of Dickinson College." Later he was Vice President of a meeting called for the purpose of inviting Andrew Jackson, then President of the United States, to visit Carlisle as its guest of honor. It was thought fitting that "Old Hickory" should thus honor the town of Carlisle, where in 1823 was held a meeting which gave to his presidential aspirations their first national notice.

His connection with the inauguration of a Department of Law in Dickinson College will receive recognition in the story of the Law School appearing in this issue of the Law Review.

Judge Reed edited and had published in Carlisle by George Fleming in two volumes, "A Pennsylvania Blackstone, modification of the commentaries of Sir Wm. Blackstone, so as to present an elementary exposition of the Laws of Pennsylvania, common and statute, with a short notice of the Judiciary of the U. S." Copies are preserved by the New York Public Library.

In 1835 on Christmas Day, the annual meeting of the local society for the promotion of temperance was held. At this meeting John Reed, President Judge of the Court of Common Pleas and recently appointed Professor of Law in Dickinson College offered, and sustained by an able address the following resolution, viz: "That the cause of Temperance is the cause of Humanity, of Philanthropy and of Religion; and that all laws licensing or in any way recognizing the traffic in or sale of ardent spirits are erroneous in principle and injurious in practice."

When in 1839, by a change in the Constitution of the Commonwealth his commission as Judge expired, he resumed the practice of law in Carlisle; the notice of such intention appearing in the local papers, viz: "Law Notice, J. Reed, being relieved from the duties of his late office as Judge, proposes to resume the practice of Law at Carlisle, Pa. He tenders his service to all who may think it their interest to employ him. His office is in his home, opposite the College Campus. The Law School under his care will be continued and he hopes to be able to bestow upon it more uninterrupted attention."

The local papers on January 23, 1850, as was then the custom, gave this simple notice of his death under a caption "DEATHS", "In this town on Saturday last Hon. John Reed in the 64th. year of his age."

Special meetings were reported of the College Faculty and of the Student Body at both of which were adopted appropriate resolutions on his death and providing that "all wear the usual badge of mourning for 30 days."

In addition the Faculty "cherished a grateful recollection of his high virtue and superior qualifications as a citizen, a jurist and a college official." The Student Body felt that "in the loss of a kind husband and an affectionate

father this community has been deprived of one of its brightest ornaments and one of the warmest friends of common humanity, and we as students of one of our most honored and esteemed instructors."

Judge Reed left to survive him a widow, Sarah A. Reed and a daughter Anna Matilda Reed, the wife of William M. Watts, for many years the proprietor of the iron works at Pine Grove Furnace, Cumberland County, Pa.

The mortal remains of Judge Reed, his widow and daughter rest in the Old Grave Yard of Carlisle.