

**MEMORIAL ADDRESSES ON THE LIFE  
AND CHARACTER OF JOHN COVODE: A  
REPRESENTATIVE FROM PENNSYLVANIA,  
DELIVERED IN THE SENATE AND HOUSE  
OF REPRESENTATIVES, FEBRUARY 9 AND  
10, 1871**

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Memorial Addresses on the Life and Character of John Covode: A Representative from Pennsylvania, delivered in the senate and house of representatives, February 9 and 10, 1871 by United States Congress

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**UNITED STATES CONGRESS**

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OF

JOHN COVODE,

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## PROCEEDINGS IN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

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### *REMARKS OF MR. KELLEY, OF PENNSYLVANIA.*

Mr. SPEAKER: We have again been painfully reminded that there is an appointed time to man on earth, and that he is consumed, and vanisheth away as the cloud. When on Friday, the 6th of January, he left Washington for a brief visit to Philadelphia and Harrisburg, few of us appeared to have a firmer hold on life or the more assured promise of a green and comfortable old age than my late colleague, Hon. John Covode. Descending from ancestors on either side whose lives had been prolonged beyond the allotted period, endowed with a robust and muscular frame, and having enjoyed singular immunity from disease, he was happy in the thought that at the expiration of this Congress he was to return to private life and devote his energies to the promotion of several enterprises in which his interests and feelings were engaged. But it was not so appointed. He was not to return to his place in this hall; and the execution of his cherished purposes was to be confided to other hands.

From Philadelphia he went with his younger sons to West Chester, Pennsylvania, to replace them in the excellent academy in which they had been receiving those educational advantages of which untoward circumstances had deprived their father. Accompanied by his wife he proceeded to Harrisburg on the 10th of January. He was in the enjoyment of his usual vigorous health, and passed the evening in cheerful intercourse with friends assembled at its capital from the several quarters of his native State. Expecting to take the early morning train, he retired early and slept, free from apprehension of the dread summoner. About three o'clock he was awaked by a severe pain about the heart. What wife and friends and medical skill could do for his relief was done; but in less than two brief hours the strong man feebly gasped the dread words, "I am dying," and passed beyond the sphere of temporal trials or triumphs.

A distinguished citizen of Massachusetts, in the course of an

elaborate article entitled "The Government and the Railroad Corporations," in the last number of the North American Review, in characterizing the people of Pennsylvania, says:

"They are not marked by intelligence. They are, in fact, dull, uninteresting, very slow, and very persevering. These are qualities, however, which they hold in common with the ancient Romans. And they possess also, in a marked degree, one other characteristic of that classic race, the power of organization, and through it of command. They have always decided our presidential elections; they have always, in their dull, heavy fashion, regulated our economical policy; their iron-masters have, in truth, proved iron masters indeed, when viewed by other localities through the medium of the protective system by them imposed. Not open to argument, not receptive of ideas, not given to flashes of brilliant execution, this State none the less knows well what it wants, and knows equally well how to organize to secure it."

The author of this paragraph would probably have found little to commend in the character and career of Mr. Covode, who was born in the mountainous wilds of Western Pennsylvania many years before that State had provided common schools for its children, and whose childhood and youth were passed in toil on a farm and in a woolen mill. He had not studied the writings of Kant, Fichte, or Hegel, or even made himself familiar with those of Carlyle or Emerson. But, ignorant as he may have been of the doctrine of intuitive perceptions and the body of transcendental philosophy, he had, without these aids, attained such a knowledge of the uses of material nature, and the springs that animate, impel, or restrain men, as made him the welcome and trusted counselor, when maturing their grandest projects, of men far more learned, brilliant, and distinguished than himself. His letters contain no quotations from classic authors, but are replete with evidence of his sagacity, insight into the motives of men, and masculine and matured judgment.

Mr. Covode was born in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, on the 17th of March, 1808. That his parentage was humble will be inferred from the fact that his grandfather, Garrett Covode, a native

of Holland, was when a child kidnapped in the streets of Amsterdam by a sea-captain, who brought him to Philadelphia and under then existing laws sold him into bondage as a "redemptioner," in which condition he was held for some years after coming to manhood, and was subsequently employed as a domestic servant in the household of General Washington. He died in 1826 at the advanced age of ninety-four years. The mother of Mr. Covode was a Quaker, and it is among the traditions of her family that two of her ancestors, together with a person named Wood, prepared and published a protest against the decision of William Penn recognizing the legality of African slavery. This protest is said to have been the first anti-slavery manifesto published in this country.

The first public office filled by Mr. Covode was that of justice of the peace "for Ligonier and Fairfield Townships," to which he was appointed by Governor Wolf before he was twenty-four years of age. Then, and in this humble office, it was that his neighbors bestowed upon him the *sobriquet* of honest John Covode. His office, to which angry litigants were summoned, was in truth a court of conciliation, in which, regardless of the emoluments of office, the judge found his duty and pleasure in adjusting by compromise disputed claims between neighbors and soothing their exasperation.

In 1845 he was nominated by the Whig conferees of the counties of Somerset and Westmorland as the candidate of that party for State Senator. The district was largely Democratic and he was defeated, although he received several hundred more votes than any other candidate on the State or local ticket of his party. At the next senatorial election he was again nominated, and such was his personal popularity that though both counties gave large Democratic majorities for the general ticket, he came within fifty votes of election. In 1854 he was nominated for Congress by the Whigs of the nineteenth district, consisting of Westmoreland, Indiana, and Armstrong Counties. His competitor had been returned at the preceding election by a large majority, but Mr. Covode led him 2,757 votes, and was returned. This was the Thirty-fourth Congress, and he was re-elected to the Thirty-fifth, Thirty-sixth, and Thirty-seventh.



On the 5th of March, 1860, he introduced a resolution providing for a committee of five members of the House "for the purpose of investigating whether the President of the United States or any other officer of the Government has, by money, patronage, or other improper means, sought to influence the action of Congress, or any committees thereof, for or against the passage of any law appertaining to the rights of any State or Territory," &c.

Few who were engaged in the political struggles of those days will forget the industry, energy, and ability with which Mr. Covode conducted the investigation ordered by this resolution, or the influence his elaborate report had upon the public mind. The report was a thorough exposure of the corrupt appliances by which the Kansas-Nebraska legislation had been secured, and was soon in the hands of every Republican speaker or writer in the country.

Mr. Covode was twice married, and had three sons by his first marriage, all of whom he gave to the country upon the breaking out of the war. George, the eldest, rose by gradual and well-won promotion to the rank of colonel, and was killed, while leading his regiment, at the battle of St. Mary's Church, in 1864. The youngest, Jacob, pined for more than eighteen months in the loathsome and pestilential pen provided for Union prisoners at Andersonville. He still lives, a broken and prematurely old man. Mr. Covode's industry and enterprise had meanwhile secured him an ample competence, and with his sons he was ready to devote this, too, to his country; and while bankers and capitalists were doubting the propriety of investing in the war loan about to be issued, the telegraph informed the people that John Covode had apprised the Secretary of the Treasury of his purpose to take \$50,000 of the forthcoming bonds.

He was a member of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. To the labors of this committee he devoted himself with untiring zeal until the 4th of March, 1863, when, having declined a nomination, he retired from Congress. Availing himself of the knowledge Mr. Covode had thus acquired, and of his quick perception of the motives of men, President Johnson requested him

to make a tour of observation through the unreconstructed States and report his conclusions and the general facts upon which they were based. But, observing the change that had taken place in the views and purposes of the President, he soon returned and submitted a report, which was never made public, though the House called upon the President for a copy thereof.

Mr. Covode having refused to be a candidate, the district was represented by a Democrat, Hon. John L. Dawson, in the Thirty-eighth and Thirty-ninth Congresses. Yielding to the demands of his party, he however accepted a nomination for the Fortieth and was returned by a handsome majority, and was, after a contest by Hon. Henry D. Foster, also awarded a seat in the Forty-first Congress. His influence was not confined to his county or congressional district. It was felt throughout the State, not only in politics, but in all measures projected for the development of its boundless material resources. Having been appointed to the position in 1869, and conducted the campaign that resulted in the re-election of Governor Geary, he was at the time of his death chairman of the Republican State central committee.

In comparatively early manhood he became the owner of the woolen mill in which he had been employed when a boy. He watched with interest our progress in the manufacture of textiles, and labored to promote their diversification and perfection. But his mill did not offer an adequate field for his activity. He took a zealous part in promoting the construction of internal improvements by which the seaboard should be connected with the then opening West, and on the completion of the Pennsylvania Canal engaged largely in the business of transportation. He was also a liberal and energetic promoter of the construction of the Pennsylvania Central Railroad. On the completion of this road to Lockport, where he lived and superintended his mill, he concentrated his stock upon the western sections of the canal and engaged in forwarding to and from Pittsburg the rapidly increasing freight moved by the railroad. About this time he also organized the Westmoreland Coal Company, which has developed the immense deposits of gas coal that underlie

in such affluence his native hills. By this operation he added to the wealth of every farmer in the county, for the army of stalwart men now earning liberal wages by mining and handling this coal is so numerous that it gives them a steady home market, not only for the cereals, but the minor productions of the farm which will not bear extended transportation.

Mr. Speaker, what I have said is sufficient to show that Mr. Covode was a man of power and a useful citizen. He had long been a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, was faithful in all the relations of life, and his story may be read with profit by the youth of the country. Born subject to those "twin jailers of the daring heart, low birth and iron fortune," and receiving the benefits of but the smallest opportunities for early culture, he mastered fortune, commanded the confidence of his neighbors and fellow-citizens, and secured for his name an honorable place in his country's history, and, by originating and promoting beneficent enterprises, wrote it enduringly on the hills and in the homes of his native county. He left a wife and seven children to mourn his sudden death. The results of his provident care surround them, and their sorrow is alleviated by the confident assurance that he who was so fondly devoted to them has entered upon the rewards that are earned by a well-spent life.

Mr. Speaker, I submit the following resolutions:

*Resolved*, That the House has heard with deep regret of the death of Honorable John Covode, a member of this House from the State of Pennsylvania.

*Resolved*, That, as a testimony of respect to the memory of the deceased, the officers and members of this House will wear the usual badge of mourning for the space of thirty days.

*Resolved*, That a copy of these resolutions be transmitted to the family of the deceased by the Clerk.

*Resolved*, That the House, as a further mark of respect to the deceased, do now adjourn.