

Biographical & Historical Memoirs of North East Arkansas
Goodspeed's

Cowan

Prof. **Robert L. Cowan**, educator, Harrisburg, Ark. Originally from Warrick County, Ind., where his birth occurred on the 14th of March, 1852, Prof. Cowan is possessed of those advanced ideas and progressive principles regarding educational matters which make his name familiar throughout this part of the State. His parents, **Rev. John D. and Elizabeth (Knight) Cowan**, were natives of Tennessee and Indiana, respectively.

The father was a graduate of Princeton College, New Jersey, and about 1849 or 1850 he was ordained to the Presbyterian ministry. He at once received the appointment of principal of Newburg Academy, at Newburg, Ind., which position he filled with honor until 1858, when he was made financial agent of Union College, at Virginia, Cass County, Ill. He remained in this position until near the close of his life, in 1865. At the age of sixteen, in company with two others of about the same age, he rode from Holly Springs, Miss., to Texas, and was forty days making the journey. They lost themselves in the wild and unbroken forests of Eastern Arkansas, wandered around for several days, and at last found Crowley's Ridge, which they followed north for some distance; then crossed over White River Valley, thence south to the Arkansas River, and after crossing this stream were near the present site of the city of Little Rock. From there they went to Shreveport, and then to Texas.

Mr. **Cowan** remained in that State for four years, and during that time served as a soldier in the Texan army. He was wounded by arrows, and carried the scars to his grave. As pay for his services in the army he received a quarter of a league of Texas land (about 320 acres). In the meantime he had united with the Presbyterian Church, and was sent by the presbytery to attend Princeton College, as before stated. Prof. **Cowan's** paternal grandfather, **David Cowan**, was a native of Tennessee, and a farmer by occupation; was one of **Gen.**

Jackson's soldiers in the battle of New Orleans, and met his death by being accidentally shot during a bear-hunt in 1832.

His father, **John Cowan**, was a native of Edinburgh, Scotland, and an early settler of Virginia, although later in life he drifted westward to Tennessee. His brother, **David Cowan**, came to America with him, and made his home in Pennsylvania. His son, **Edgar Cowan**, was United States senator from Pennsylvania during the war. Prof.

Cowan's maternal grandfather, **Isaac Knight**, was a native of Pennsylvania, and emigrated with his father, **Abraham Knight**, to Henderson, Ky., in the year 1790. Two years later he was captured by the Indians, by whom he was kept a prisoner for two and a half years. He then escaped in the Straits of Mackinaw, by being hidden on a English trading vessel by a colored cook. He landed on terra firma in Detroit, and made his way home, after a perilous trip of six months. He followed agricultural pursuits, and opened up several large farms in Southern Indiana. His death occurred in 1858. **Rev.**

John D. Cowan and **Elizabeth Knight** were married on the 20th of May, 1851, and Prof. **Robert L. Cowan** is their only child. His mother died on the 19th of August, 1854, and the father was married the second time on the 28th of December, 1859, to Miss **Mary A. Bell**, daughter of **A. W. Bell**, a prominent farmer of Central Illinois. To this union was born one child, Alex. B., whose birth occurred on the 2nd of March, 1861, and who is married and has two children. He is the present manager of the Western Union Telegraph Company, at Quincy, Ill., and he, with his son, four years of age, and the subject of this sketch, are the only survivors bearing the family name.

Prof. **Cowan** passed his boyhood days in poring over his books at home, and later attended the Presbyterian Academy in Macon County, Ill. After completing his studies in that college, in 1875, he went to Evansville, Ind., and filled the position of professor in the scientific department of the public high school of that city for five years.

In 1880 he was elected county examiner of Vanderburgh County, which position he held until 1883, and then accepted the position of assistant engineer of the Danville, Olney & Ohio Railroad, while making the survey from Olney to Paducah, Ky. After this he was an engineer in the sub-marine work in the building of the bridge across

the Ohio River, at Henderson, Ky. Following this Prof. **Cowan** was assistant engineer in the building of the Toledo, Cincinnati & St. Louis Railroad, between Toledo, Cincinnati and St. Louis. He then returned to Decatur in poor health, and remained in that city one year, when, in November, 1886, he came to Poinsett County, Ark. After locating here he followed the timber business, and then engaged in teaching, having charge of the Harrisburg schools in 1887 and 1889. His marriage occurred on the 20th of December, 1889, to Miss **Maud Sloan**, daughter of **Judge G. W. Sloan**, who keeps a hotel and is undertaker at Harrisburg.

Prof. **Cowan** is a member of the Presbyterian Church, and Mrs. **Cowan** belongs to the Methodist Episcopal Church. He is a member of the A. F. & A. M., Lodge No. 64, Evansville, and holds the position of reporter of Lodge No. 3380, Knights of Honor (Bolivar Lodge). He takes an active part in politics, votes with the Republican party, is chairman of his county committee, and is a member of both the State Central and Congressional committees. He takes an active interest in and gives his support to all public enterprises.

Poinsett County
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