

MUHLENBERG COUNTY HISTORY



Duncan came to county from Scotland, left lasting legacy

By AMIE WALTRIP

Muhlenberg County has had its share of influential men and women, particularly in the fields of music and, of course, coal mining. Some of those, like Thomas Coleman DuPont, I've written about before. But there's no denying that today's topic holds a special place in my heart.

With all I've learned about him over the past several years, I almost feel like I know him personally ... even though he died more than 50 years before I was even born.

The man in question is coal mine owner/operator William Graham Duncan.

Mr. Duncan – he was apparently a very distinguished and proper gentleman, and I cannot think of him without the “Mister” – was born in Scotland on September 4, 1851 to Andrew and Mary Duncan. His family immigrated to the United States soon after, where Andrew managed a mining operation for Robert Alexander at Airdrie here in Muhlenberg County. The Duncans moved to Ohio County when Alexander discontinued operations, and in 1873, Mr. Duncan entered the world of coal mining for himself. He partnered with his father Andrew and Colonel Henry McHenry to open the McHenry and Echols Coal Company.

Sixteen years later, in 1899, Mr. Duncan again struck out on his own, this time back in Muhlenberg County. He established his own W.G. Duncan Coal Company in Greenville and opened a mine west of town at what would become known as Luzerne.

Encouraged by his success, Mr. Duncan opened a second mine three years later. This second mine, and the company town that grew up around it, were subtly named for the man himself: Graham.

The W.G. Duncan Coal Company prospered, and Mr. Duncan became a rich man. He built a large Queen Anne-style home at 117 South Cherry Street – a neighborhood inhabit many of Greenville's wealthy and elite residents lived – in 1907. That house still stands today at the corner of South Cherry and Campbell Streets. And five years later, expressing a desire both to “downsize” and to satisfy a friendly rivalry with neighbor and fellow mine owner William A. Wickliffe, Mr. Duncan built a Spanish Mission-style home at 122 South Cherry Street with



William Graham Duncan



W.G. Duncan (second from left) with his children, Andrew, Katie Belle and W.G. Jr., in the yard of the Thistle Cottage on Mr. Duncan's 70th birthday in September 1921. The house in the background is not the Thistle Cottage, but is next door at 120 South Cherry Street, where W.G. Duncan Jr. lived at the time. Andrew and his family lived across the street at 123 S. Cherry. (All photos are from the Duncan collection at Thistle Cottage)

intricate wood-inlay floors, ornate wood paneling on the walls and prominent stained glass windows. He called it Thistle Cottage, in honor of his home country's national emblem, the thistle, and he lived there for the rest of his life.

Family members described Mr. Duncan as an ostentatious but generous man. He enjoyed having fine things for himself and his family, but he was also happy to donate to worthy causes. He was very religious; he operated a separate bank account into which he automatically put 10 percent of his income for tithing purposes. He usually carried a cane, more for looks than for support, and one grandson reported that he could not remember ever seeing him without his suit coat on. He loved fishing and often visited Miami, Fla. to indulge his love of the sport, and when his birthday rolled around, he was always excited to celebrate the occasion.

Mr. Duncan died on June 10, 1929, and after a memorial service in Greenville, conducted by none other than the president of Louisville Presbyterian Seminary, John Vander Meulen, his body was transported by special funeral train to Louisville. He is buried at Cave Hill Cemetery in that city.

Thanks to the care and foresight of Mr. Duncan's descendants, we are able to keep his memory alive. Hamilton, the last family member to own Thistle Cottage, donated the home to the city of Greenville in the mid-1980s for the purpose of turning it into a museum. The Duncan Center opened to the public in 1989. The facility remains open today, now under the care of the public library system and back under its original name of Thistle Cottage.

The museum and archives at Thistle Cottage includes Duncan family memorabilia and information in the permanent exhibits and research collections, and there is also a temporary special exhibit featuring the family on display now through the end of September.

Muhlenberg County Public Libraries is also planning a special public birthday celebration at Thistle Cottage on September 5 in honor of Mr. Duncan, who would be turning 172 years old on Labor Day this year if he were still alive.

I'll be there to celebrate Mr. Duncan at Thistle Cottage on Sept. 5, and I hope I'll see you there, too! He would want it that way!

Legislators vow to fight fentanyl

The Interim Joint Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public Protection heard impassioned testimony Tuesday from those who lost loved ones to fentanyl, and some lawmakers vowed to continue fighting the drug through legislation.

Three women involved with The Never Alone Nick Rucker Foundation – a nonprofit group formed to warn the public about the dangers of fentanyl, end stigma and change laws – told legislators about the devastating impact of fentanyl on their families.

One legislator who accompanied the women, Rep. Candy Massaroni, R-Bardstown, described fentanyl as a ticking time bomb in Kentucky's neighborhoods, school and workplaces.

“Today, we just want to address an issue. It's a heart-wrenching issue that's affecting every community across the nation and especially Kentucky. It's the deadly impact of the drug car-

tels who are peddling not only illegal narcotics, but a hidden danger – fentanyl,” she said.

Tami Boblitt said she struggled to find treatment for her son, Chase, who died from an overdose in June 2021. Boblitt said they went to six treatment facilities in one day and were turned away for a multitude of reasons.

“The stigma is terrible. I was treated poorly. Chase was treated poorly. Even the places where we were going to for help, we were treated very poorly,” she said. “So we're just trying to raise awareness. We want people to understand we're normal people. These things happen to lots of families.”

Boblitt is supporting a proposal called Chase's Law, which seeks to reduce stigma and provide people with a safe place to recover after they receive Narcan, an anti-overdose drug.

While she said jail is not the answer, a 72-hour hold or similar intervention would help prevent

deaths that can occur even after someone becomes alert and seems to be much better, she argued.

Another mother, Ashley Green, testified about her 3-year old son's fentanyl-related death and her own struggles with drug use.

Green said her son was exposed while in a house with four people, one of whom had fentanyl. Nobody has admitted they had the drug, and laws are too weak to provide justice, she added.

“He did not do fentanyl. He did not come across this, you know, on his own. An adult in that house had it, and nobody's going to be prosecuted for that. That's not fair to him or his life, nor his purpose. He came to save me from addiction,” she said.

Rep. Chris Fugate, R-Chavies, who served with the Kentucky State Police for 22 years, said the legislature had a “great opportunity” to be more stringent regarding fentanyl dealers two

years ago, but legislation didn't pass.

“They ought to have to serve jail time. We've become so soft in this country on people who are killing our people,” he said.

Rep. John Blanton, R-Salyersville, who also worked for KSP, said those who sell drugs to support their habit are still dealers. He said he's working with Rep. Deanna Frazier Gordon, R-Richmond, on legislation that would toughen drug-related penalties.

“If you provide drugs to somebody and they lose their life, then you ought to be charged with murder, period, because you're responsible for their death,” he said.

Sen. Matthew Deneen, R-Elizabethtown, said he encourages committee members to support state funding for the 11 drug task forces in Kentucky. He said not funding them amply is costing lives and this should be addressed during the upcoming legislative session, which starts in January.

Gas prices fall last week

Average gasoline prices in Kentucky have fallen 7.2 cents per gallon in the last week, averaging \$3.50/g on Aug. 28, according to GasBuddy's survey of 2,623 stations in Kentucky. Prices in Kentucky are 4.5 cents per gallon higher than a month ago and stand 5.3 cents per gallon higher than a year ago. The national average price of diesel has risen 3.3 cents in the last week and stands at \$4.333 per gallon.

According to GasBuddy price reports, the cheapest station in Kentucky was priced at \$3.04/g on Aug. 27 while the most expensive was \$4.09/g, a difference of \$1.05/g.

The national average price of gasoline has fallen 4.0 cents per gallon in the last week, averaging \$3.78/g Aug. 28. The national average is up 5.8 cents per gallon from a month ago and stands 3.5 cents per gallon lower than a year ago, according to GasBuddy data compiled from more than 11 million weekly price reports covering over 150,000 gas stations across the country.

Kentucky Wesleyan announces graduates

Kentucky Wesleyan College awarded bachelor's degrees and associate of science degrees at the 155th Commencement on May 6, 2023, to the following students:

Peyton Johnson, Summa Cum Laude, received a bachelor of arts degree in Communication Arts.

Kyleigh Laster, Summa Cum Laude, received a bachelor of science degree in Accounting; Christopher Mangold, Magna Cum Laude, received a bachelor of science degree in Business Administration; Megan Patton received a bachelor of science degree in Communication Arts.

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