

1885

Gov. Samuel W. Black

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GOV. SAMUEL W. BLACK.

The following biography of ex-governor Samuel W. Black was written and furnished the Nebraska State Historical Society by his daughter:

SAMUEL W. BLACK, Colonel of the Sixty-second regiment, was born at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1818. He was the son of Rev. John Black, D.D., one of the earliest and most distinguished of the Covenanter clergymen of the state. He received a liberal education, and chose the law as his profession, in which he soon rose to a lucrative practice, and withal became prominent in political life, being especially effective upon the stump. He married, when very young, the daughter of Judge Irvin, of Pittsburgh, by whom he had four children. In the Mexican War he served as Lieutenant Colonel of the Second Pennsylvania regiment, and acquitted himself with great distinction. He was appointed United States Judge for Nebraska territory by President Buchanan, in 1859. In the spring of 1861 he recruited the Sixty-second regiment, of which he was commissioned Col. and was assigned to duty in Monell's brigade of Porter's division. He was engaged at Hanover Court House, where the enemy was put to flight and his camp and garrison equipage and many prisoners were taken. The enemy soon began to make himself felt on the left bank of the Chickahominy, and on the 26th of June, 1862, fought a stubborn battle at Beaver Dam creek. The Pennsylvania Reserves were upon the front, but the brigade to which Col. Black belonged was soon ordered to their support. Col. Black led his men forward with that fervor and enthusiasm which always characterized him, anticipating severe fighting, but the Reserves were able to hold their position, and Col. Black, though under fire, was not engaged. In the night the Union forces retired to Gaines' Mill, where, on the following day, the battle was renewed with great fury. At the very outset of the battle the Sixty-second Pennsylvania and the Ninth Massachusetts were ordered to advance under a terrific infantry fire. They charged across a ravine in their front, and gained the woods on the opposite side, handsomely driving the enemy. But while making the charge, and before the woods were reached, Col. Black, while the heroic effort which he inspired was in full tide, was killed. Few Pennsylvania soldiers, at

the time of his death, had made a brighter record, and none could look forward with better hope of advancement. He died deeply lamented by the whole state and mourned by a wide circle of personal friends.

Of his personal traits the following obituary from the pen of John W. Forney, conveys a vivid idea: "Twenty-two years ago, more or less, a young man electrified the cities and towns of Western Pennsylvania by his peculiar and irresistible eloquence. He was more boy than man. His fine face and laughing eye, his well-knit and handsome figure, his winning voice, and his mother-wit made "Sam. Black" the wonder of more than one exciting campaign. The son of a Presbyterian clergyman who was an object of veneration and love in thousands of hearts, and whose life had been one prayer and sacrifice and thanksgiving to God, Sam. inherited a fervent religious sentiment, and frequently punctuated his political appeals and legal arguments with Bible points and periods, and how he loved that old gray-haired father! In his most impulsive moments, however surrounded or flattered or aroused, whether fired with indignation or reveling with merriment created by his exuberant humor, a mere allusion to his father called tears to his eyes and gratitude to his lips. To fall in the battle-field, and for his country, was to die as Samuel W. Black preferred to die. If there was one trait conspicuous in him it was courage, and courage of the purest chivalry. It called him to the fields of Mexico, where he plucked laurels almost from the cannon's mouth. It always made him the champion of the weak or the wronged. It made him irresistible at the bar, and in the exciting passages of public life it demanded the obedience of the bully and commanded the highest respect of the true gentleman."

His first great effort as a lawyer was in the celebrated trial of the notorious mail robber, Braddee, of Uniontown, in 1841. Upon that occasion he gave evidence of great genius and commanding eloquence. From that period until 1846 his rise in the profession was almost unprecedentedly rapid, when he abandoned the profession of the law for that of the soldier. As Lieutenant Colonel of the 1st Pennsylvania Volunteers in Mexico he distinguished himself at Cerro Gordo and Pueblo. His career in Mexico was so brilliant as to induce the Democracy to nominate him for Congress, while he was still in the field. In the Democratic State Gubernatorial Convention, in 1857, he was a prominent candidate for nomination, receiving upon several ballots forty-seven votes. Shortly afterwards he went to Nebraska.