

1885

SKETCH BOOK

of



DANVILLE

ITS MANUFACTURES VA AND COMMERCE
ILLUSTRATED.

EDWARD POLLOCK.

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Dr. Nathaniel T. Green—Born in Halifax County, Virginia, and removed to Danville while still quite young. He studied medicine with the elder Dr. Patton. Taught school, at the Danville Male Academy, under Levi Holbrook. Went to Philadelphia, and returned here to practice medicine with Dr. Patton. He was a man of such remarkably quick perception of disease and had acquired so thorough a knowledge of the theory and practice of medicine, that he became one of the most eminent physicians in this district. He had a large family—several daughters and three sons. Of the latter, two became physicians and one a lawyer, afterwards a Judge of the Circuit Court. During the war he was held as a hostage by the Federals for several months to secure the safety of a man arrested in Pittsylvania County. His youngest son, Dr. James C. Green, who died early this year (1885), became, like his father, the leading physician of this section of country. The only surviving son of Dr. N. T. Green, is Judge Berryman Green, of the firm of Green & Miller, Attorneys-at-Law, practicing in Danville.

Levi Holbrook—A native of Massachusetts. After his father's death came South and settled near Cunningham's Store, North Carolina. Came to Danville in 1817 and established the Danville Male Academy, at which most of the young men of that day were educated. Was the first teacher of high character that ever settled in Danville. In 1825 gave up the Male Academy and established the Danville Female Academy, which became the most prominent female seminary in this section. He was a man of great energy and public spirit, and made a success of all his undertakings. He invested his money so wisely as to become a rich man. He was a strict disciplinarian and fully believed, with Solomon, in the free application of the rod, as some of the surviving "old boys" can testify. He retired from the Academy in 1833, leaving it with a high name and in excellent condition. He left one son, now a resident of New York.

Thomas D. Neal—Born near Spring Garden, Pittsylvania County, Va., on October 29th, 1812. His mother was the daughter of Capt. Mastin Williams, one of Danville's earliest settlers, who built the old Exchange Hotel and was owner of the first grist and saw mills ever erected in the town. This property bequeathed to his sons James Mastin Williams, Jr., and Robert W. Williams, with whom their nephew, Thomas D. Neal, remained for several years and acquired a knowledge of the milling business. He subsequently became salesman in the grocery and dry goods store also owned by his uncles, who admitted him to partnership in 1833, at which time the firm built and occupied the two brick stores on Main Street, opposite Craghead, now occupied by Robert Brydon and W. H. Rice & Co. The firm had also a branch store at Madison, N. C., and continued in business several years, during which they manifested great enterprise and public spirit. The junior partner, Mr. Neal, was specially noted for his energy and business push. The firm established a regular line of batteaux between Madison, N. C., *via* Danville, to Weldon, N. C., connecting at the latter place with the Petersburg Railroad. This line carried all the freight to and from this whole section of country, and afforded the only means of transportation. After a long and successful business career, this firm was overtaken by the reverses which befell the whole country during Gen. Jackson's administration—the result, probably, of his "sub-treasury scheme" and the bitter war he waged against the old United States Bank. Rallying from the blow with characteristic pluck, Mr. Neal, in 1835, engaged in business on his own account as tobacco auctioneer, of which he had a monopoly for several years. In 1838 he began manufacturing tobacco, and associated with him, subsequently, as partners, Josiah Wills, of Norfolk, Banister Anderson, of Pittsylvania County, and Thompson Coleman, of Danville, with whom he continued the business till 1857. After the dissolution of this partnership Mr. Neal continued manufacturing tobacco alone till the war broke out in 1861. In 1853, while still a tobacco manufacturer, Mr. Neal established a steamboat line to run on Dan River between Danville and South Boston, the point to which the Richmond & Danville Railroad had then been constructed. Only one steamboat was put upon the line and it proved quite a success. It was discontinued when the railroad was completed to Danville. The "skipper" of this boat was an old colored boatman named Billy Mitchell, who still survives. Mr. Neal was also a contractor for completing the railroad from New Ferry to Danville, in making the road-bed, furnishing the ties, &c. His earnest interest in all works of internal improvement likely to benefit Danville, was manifested by his active participation in every wise scheme of that kind ever proposed. He was one of the earliest and most zealous advocates of the construction of the Richmond & Danville Railroad and a subscriber to its original capital stock, while to his influence with the people was largely due the liberal subscription to it made by the Town in its corporate capacity. Upon the reorganization of the Company after the war, Mr. Neal was elected by the

stockholders Chairman of the Examining Board, whose duty it was to inspect the road annually from Richmond to Charlotte, N. C., including its leased lines to Goldsboro and other points. Mr. Neal was elected a member of the first Town Council of Danville, and served as Councilman again and again till the breaking out of the war in 1861. It was due to his exertions that the measure for lighting the streets with lamps was first passed, together with several other public improvements. He was a prominent and active member of the Masonic Fraternity and a member of the Building Committee of the Masonic Temple. He was also Chairman of the Building Committee of the Roanoke Female College. But it was as a member of the tobacco trade of Danville that he stood out most prominently. The present warehouse system, to which the Town mainly owes its prosperity, was inaugurated by him at Neal's Warehouse in 1858. (See page 34, *ante*.) When the war broke out, although past the age of enforced military service, Mr. Neal took an active part in the formation of the Home Guard, of which company he was elected Orderly Sergeant. These veterans were never called into active service, but Mr. Neal joined "the boys" in the field as an independent volunteer, and, as such, was present at the first battle of Manassas. Later in the war he spent much time with the brigade to which most of the Danville troops were attached. When peace was restored he removed to Richmond, where he established himself as a Tobacco Commission Merchant, which business he pursued until his death, which occurred on June 21st, 1884. He was buried in Hollywood Cemetery. His widow and all his surviving family now reside in Richmond, except two sons, James M. and John C. Neal, and one daughter, Mrs. P. W. Ferrell, who still call Danville their home.

Capt. James M. Williams—Born in Pittsylvania County, Virginia, in 1802. Settled in Danville in 1820. In connection with his brother, Robert W. Williams, inherited the grist and saw-mills then newly erected on the canal, above and below the bridge. He built, and for many years kept, the old Exchange Hotel, a wooden building, two stories high, at the foot of Main Street. This house was destroyed by fire in 1853, and the present brick building, bearing the same name, was erected by Captain Williams on the same site. He was also engaged in the mercantile business in a store on Main Street nearly opposite his Hotel. He was for many years an Alderman of the Town under the *ancien regime*, and at the time of his death was collector of the tax-in-kind for the Confederate Government. He was killed in 1864 by a man named Echols, who died soon afterwards in jail from self-inflicted injuries.

Col. Wm. H. Wooding—Born in Pittsylvania County, Virginia, in 1806. Died in Danville in 1872. For several terms he was a member of the House of Delegates as representative from Danville and Pittsylvania County, and afterwards for several terms represented the Pittsylvania Senatorial District in the State Senate. For some years he resided in the vicinity of Danville and permanently settled in the Town in 1858. Since the war he was elected and served the City as Mayor during several terms.

Miss Ann Benedict—Miss Excellence Smith—No biographical memoranda of Danville would be complete without mention of these two ladies who have left the impression of their influence upon "the times in which they lived." The first named was for many years the Principal of a large Female Seminary on Wilson Street, at which many of the mothers and grandmothers of modern Danville and the surrounding country were educated. Miss Smith was the instructor in music at this institution. Both ladies were natives of Northern States. The building in which the Seminary was conducted was known as the Benedict House, and became afterwards the *ast office* of the Confederate States Government. (See page 59, *ante*.)

William Ayres—Is one of Danville's "oldest inhabitants," having settled here in (or about) 1832. His original trade was that of carriage upholsterer, but he afterwards engaged in the confectionery business. Many years before the war he began manufacturing tobacco and was one of Danville's pioneers in that industry. The name of the firm was Wm. Ayres & Son. It was succeeded in 1867 by the firm of Geo. C. & D. Ayres, both members of which are sons of Mr. Wm. Ayres, who now resides on Wilson Street, and has reached the advanced age of eighty years. He was a member of the Town Council several times prior to the war, and has done much in many ways to build up the trade and industries of Danville.

George C. Cabell—Was born in Danville, Va., January 25, 1837; was instructed by his father, the late General B. W. S. Cabell, until twelve years of age, and from that