

Commemorative Biographical Encyclopedia of the Juniata Valley, Comprising the Counties of Huntingdon, Mifflin, Juniata, and Perry, Pennsylvania, J. M. Runk and Company, Publishers 1897

**Okeson Family of Tuscarora Valley.**—**John Okeson** was the first representative in America, of this, as far as known, the only family of that name in the United States. He was a native of the city of Amsterdam, Holland, and a grandson of **Jans Okerson**, as the name was then known, who distinguished himself in a heroic engagement, which occurred during the Spanish invasion of Holland. This battle was made the object of a famous painting by the celebrated artist, Rembrandt, one of the best works found in the great Art Museum of Amsterdam. **John Okeson** came to America in the year 1690 and went out into the wilderness of New Jersey, taking up lands near where the town of Flemington stands. He was married and had two children, a son and daughter. The daughter died in early life; the son, **Thomas Okeson**, became a Baptist minister of considerable reputation in New Jersey. He married **Miss Davidson**, who bore him two children: **Elizabeth** and **Daniel**. His first wife died in September, 1731, and in September, 1739, he married **Mrs. Deborah Clayton**, a lady of some wealth. He preached his first wife's funeral sermon, but never preached any afterwards. His daughter, **Elizabeth**, married **Samuel Johnson**, and lived at Philipsburg, New Jersey when she died, in 1768. Of their family we have no definite information. His son, **Daniel Okeson**, was born in 1724, was reared a farmer, and lived near Union Furnace, in Hunterdon County, New Jersey. On February 11, 1848, he married **Angleshe Albertson**. They had four children: **Nancy**; **Sarah**; **John**, died single, aged twenty-five, and **Nicholas A. Sarah** and **Nancy** married two brothers, **William** and **John Silverthorn**, both of whom reared families. **William Silverthorn** lived and died near Belvidere on the Delaware River, N. J. **John** lived in the Tuscarora Valley, and he and his wife died in Juniata County. They had one son, **Robert**, who died some years ago near Peru, in which portion of Juniata County some of his children and grandchildren still live. **Nicholas Albertson Okeson**, youngest son of **Daniel Okeson**, married **Susan Silverthorn**, the sister of **William** and **John**. **Daniel Okeson** was on several occasions called out as a volunteer soldier to go into the frontier settlements to chastise the hostile Indians and was said to have performed good service with his trusty rifle, being an expert marksman or sharp-shooter.

During the early days of the Revolutionary War an order was issued by an officer of the British army to the people living in Hunterdon County, N. J., to go out, under command of a detailed officer, to repair the roads and bridges in that portion of the colony for the passage of the main army. Among those thus called out were **Nicholas A. Okeson** and **John Silverthorn**, then lads of seventeen years, and particular friends and chums. **Young Okeson** received an order which he did not willingly obey, not being in sympathy with the army of the King. The officer who commanded the work struck him with the flat of his sword. An active engagement at once took place between the officer and the two young lads, the officer getting the worst of the encounter. They quickly fled, and as fast as their horses would carry them, made their way to the army of General Washington on Long Island, where they both enlisted for the war, just a few days before the battle of Long Island, in which they took part. This was **Nicholas A. Okeson's** second battle with the King's forces. He also took part in the battles of Trenton, Princeton, White Plains, and Brandywine, and in the capture of Staten Island. He remained in the army until the close of the war, doing military duty in various capacities, and was for two years master of transportation in General Washington's army. A few years after he returned from the war his marriage took place.

In the fall of 1785, in company with George Carson, and some other neighbors, he made a tour to the west ; coming into Tuscarora Valley, they were pleased with the country and he purchased from a Mr. Kenaday what is now known as the old Okeson farm, near Academia. This farm consisted of several hundred acres, a shanty, and a small patch of cleared land near by a beautiful spring, flowing from the rocky hill side, beneath the shade of a great oak tree. The valley at that time was a wilderness, without wagon roads, only bridle paths along the clear streams of mountain water. The few pioneers who had located in the valley were anxious to close out their small holdings and move across the mountains to the big woods of the Ohio valley. In the following spring, 1786, **Nicholas Okeson**, with his aged father and young wife, made his way to his new home in the Tuscarora Valley, cutting his road as he traveled onward to the log cabin on the hill. It was their home for life. His father died in 1801, he in 1842 and his wife in 1841. He left a family of eight children: **John; Martha; Daniel; Sarah; Abigail; William; Mary** and **Margaret**.

**John Okeson** married **Rebecca Bull**, a sister of **Colonel Bull**, a leading soldier in the war of 1812, who was killed by the Indians in 1814, and left a family of eight children, all of whom are dead but one daughter, who married **Mr. Diven**.

**Martha Okeson (Mrs. Thomas Arbuckle)**, died recently, leaving an aged husband, but no children.

**Daniel Okeson**, born in 1786, married **Miss McBride**, and died in New Bloomfield, Perry County, Pa., where for many years he was a successful merchant. He left a family of four children: **John; Samuel; Daniel**; and **Margaret**. **John** died young; **Samuel** was a tanner, married and lived and died in Landisburg; **Daniel** married and removed to Illinois, and thence to Kansas, where he died a few years since; **Margaret** married **Dr. Milliken**, of Tuscarora Valley, and lived and died in New Bloomfield.

**Sarah Okeson**, born in 1788, married **William Ard**, died and left several children: **Joseph; Samuel William; Sarah**; and **Mary**, all of whom are now dead. Some of **Joseph's** family are now living in Pennsylvania.

**Abigail Okeson**, born in 1791, married **Mr. Cooper**, and had children: **Thomas**, a farmer, who married in Tuscarora and removed to Fulton County, and there died leaving a family; **Susan**, who married **Joseph Keister**, left children: **John**, an engineer on the Pennsylvania railroad, who was killed in an accident while running the first mail express in 1872; and **Katherine**, a most excellent woman, still living in Port Royal; **Joseph**; and **Samuel**. The last two are both married and living in the same place. **Samuel Cooper** married **Miss Sarah McGee**, was for many years engaged as a passenger conductor on the Pennsylvania Railroad, and left a family; **Elizabeth**, who died young; **Okeson**, a railroad engineer in the west; **Sarah, Mary** and **Effie**, who are now engaged in the Indian Agency School in Kansas. **Sarah** married **Captain Pearson**, Indian agent at the Pottawattomie Agency, Kansas.

**William Okeson**, born January 15, 1795, was married in 1817 to **Jane Black**, daughter of **William Black**, of Millerstown, Perry County, of which family mention is made hereafter.

**Mary Okeson**, born in 1798, married **George Black**, a brother of **Jane Black**, and removed to Columbus, Ohio, in 1829. Her husband died there in 1831, when the one child, **Louisa**, she returned to Juniata and lived there until the marriage of her daughter to **Alexander Stewart**, of Columbus, Ohio; she then returned to that city and lived with her daughter until her death in 1880 or thereabouts. **Louisa Stewart**, her daughter, had two children, **William** and **George**; **William** was a lawyer in New York and died a few years since. **George Stewart** entered Princeton College and graduated, studied theology at Princeton and became a Presbyterian minister of considerable note, now occupying the First Presbyterian Church at Harrisburg, Pa., and is highly esteemed by the people of that city. His mother still makes her home in Columbus, O., to which city she is much attached.

**Margaret Okeson**, born in February, 1802, was married in 1838, to **Samuel Black**, of Landisburg, a cousin of **Jane** and **George Black**. They had no family. They removed from Landisburg to Port Royal, Juniata County, and later to Academia, where they both died.

**Samuel Okeson**, the youngest child of **Nicholas N.** and **Susan Okeson**, was born in 1804, and married **Margaret Black**, a sister of **Samuel Black**. He was a farmer and resided on the old Okeson farm until his death in 1867; he was a good and highly-respected citizen and a man of enterprise. His wife died in 1840, leaving four children: **George**; **N. A.**; **Samuel** and **Margaret**. **George** and his brother **Albertson** went to Illinois, when young men. **George** married a lady in Indiana and settled on a farm near Chenoa, Ill., where he resided many years; he at length removed to the vicinity of Fairview, Brown County, Kan., where he and his wife still live with their children, **Samuel** and two daughters, one of whom, **Jennie**, married **Mr. Van Dalsem**. They are successful farmers and highly respected citizens of Brown County. In 1840, about four years after the death of **Samuel Okeson's** wife, he was married to **Miss Margaret Buchanan**, of Milford Township, by whom he had three children: **Alexander Stewart Okeson**; **Mary**, and **Elizabeth**. **Stewart** married and lives at Academia, and is engaged in fire insurance; **Mary** married **Dr. Brazee**, and died in 1876 or '77. **Elizabeth** lived with her mother at Academia, near her brother, **Stewart Okeson**. We should have spoken of **Samuel** and **Margaret Okeson** by the first wife, **Margaret Black**. **Margaret** died when ten years old at Landisburg; **Samuel**, her twin brother, when scarcely twenty one enlisted in the Union army for the term of the war, and served in the Army of the Potomac, taking part in all the great battles fought by that army. He was in the hottest of the decisive battle of Gettysburg, went through the entire war to the close, was a brave and heroic soldier, and came home having never received a scratch or had a day's sickness. At his father's death, he and his brother, **Albertson**, took the old farm, where they both lived until their death, **N. A.** dying single. **Samuel** married Miss **Mary Manifold**, of Washington County, Pa., who still survives him. After his death, she married **Mr. Allison**, of Des Moines, Ia., where she and her daughter live together; her son **George Okeson** resides with his uncle in Brown County, Kan.

**William Okeson**, the husband of **Jane Black**, was early in his married life a merchant in Concord, Franklin County, where he remained a few years, and then removed to a farm in Tuscarora Valley, near Bealtown. After a few years, he purchased, in 1831, the old John H. Stewart farm near Doyles Mills, where he lived many years and where his first wife, **Jane Black** died in August, 1851, respected and loved by all who knew her, a kind, good mother, and a most noble woman. In 1854, he was married to his second wife, **Mrs. Brown**, of Pittsburg. He died in

1873 at his home in Port Royal, having lived and died within a few miles of where he was born, respected as a good citizen and an honest man. He took an interest in building up Tuscarora Academy, an institution whose establishment was due to the energy and benevolence of the **Rev. McKnight Williamson**, and the pecuniary aid of the merchant, John Patterson. For many years he served as one of the trustees of this, at one time, noted institution. His family consisted of six boys and one daughter. **N. A. Okeson**, being the eldest, contrived to assist on the farm, going to school in winter as was the custom in those days, until he was eighteen, when he prepared for college; in 1840, he entered the sophomore class at Union College, N. Y., where he graduated in 1843, and soon after commenced the study of theology in the Protestant Episcopal Church, not long after taking orders, he entered the work of the ministry in Brooklyn, N. Y., where he preached for several years. In 1852, he was called to St. Paul's Church, Norfolk, a very old and wealthy congregation, where he remained until his sudden and unexpected death in the summer of 1884, at his brother **James'** house, during a vacation visit to his old home in Tuscarora Valley. His death was much lamented by all who knew him in Norfolk, and especially by his own church. His remains were placed in the handsome cemetery of his own church, and over his grave a beautiful monument was erected in honor of his memory. He was a large, fine looking man, of commanding appearance. He was regarded as an able preacher, not disposed to seek honors, but of a retiring disposition, having refused to accept the great honor of a Bishop's position in his State. He was made a D. D. by his Alma Mater and by many other colleges, but he cared nothing for titles, they being in his judgment empty honors. He married first **Miss Lucy Sturdivant**; she died some years after without issue. Some years later he married **Miss Lucy Tabb**, of an old Norfolk family. She survives him and lives at her old home in that city.

**Jonathan B. Okeson** was the second son, who, after finishing his studies at Tuscarora Academy, engaged in mercantile business, which he followed successfully most of his life. He was married in 1845, to **Miss Martha Mason**, granddaughter of the **Rev. John Mason**, of New York. She died in 1853, leaving no family. In 1871, he married **Mrs. Anna Barkley**. He died suddenly in February, 1894, after a short sickness, leaving his wife and three children: **Walter**, a graduate of Lehigh University, and acting as civil engineer for the Standard Oil Company.; **Martha**; and **Anna**, at home with their mother in Bethlehem, Pa.

**Daniel Okeson** was the next son, who after finishing an academic course, opened a store in Frederick City, Md., but soon after, in 1847, went to Chicago. When the great California gold fever broke out in 1849, he joined the great rush for gold, and made his way to the Pacific coast, which was quite an undertaking in that day. His efforts there to acquire wealth were attended with various results. He was married before leaving for California to **Miss Anna Mason**, a sister of **Martha Mason**. In two or three years after leaving the east, his family, wife and children joined him, and they remained there until 1855, when they returned to Pennsylvania. Soon after he went to Iowa and engaged in farming. In 1861, when the war with the Southern States broke out, he responded to his country's call, enlisted in the Second Iowa Cavalry as assistant quartermaster, with the rank of captain, and took part in all the battles fought by General Grant on the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers. At the battle of Corinth, Miss., he was wounded, and died soon after in the hospital at Memphis, Tenn. He was a good and brave soldier, fearless and full of energy and daring. His widow and two children went to the far west, where they all died soon after.

**James B. Okeson** was the next son, who continued to live in Tuscarora Valley as a farmer until his death about 1884. He was married to **Miss Margaret Rosevelt Mason**, a sister of **Martha** and **Anna**. He was a good citizen, and highly esteemed as a man and neighbor.

**William B. Okeson** was the next son in the family. At the age of ten he entered the Tuscarora Academy under the tuition of the Rev. McKnight Williamson, followed soon after by Prof. David Wilson, later by David Laughlin, and then again by Professor Wilson. He entered Jefferson College in November, 1846, beginning with the freshman class and graduated in July, 1850, having for classmates David Hall, D. D., Joseph Mathers, D. D., R. F. Wilson, D. D., Cyrus Pershing, D. D., RRev. Dr. Sample, Hon. Matthew Stanley Quay, and many others who have arrived at distinction in various pursuits of life. After graduating, he engaged to teach a school in Kentucky and while on his way thither was stricken with

a severe attack of fever at Columbus, O. This event changed his plans, and he entered the law office of Samuel Galloway and Henry F. Page, with whom he read law for one and a half years; he then went to Illinois, where he taught school for one year; then to Vicksburg, Miss., where he taught and read law in the office of Hon. Horatio G. Harris, a nephew of the distinguished rebel, Jefferson Davis, whom he frequently met in Mr. Harris' office. He concluded his law studies and was admitted to the bar before Judge John I. Guion, of Mississippi. Then moving to Galveston, Tex., he was admitted to the Supreme Court of Texas, at Galveston, in April, 1854, in which State he remained three years in the practice of law, when seeing, as he firmly believed, the inevitable conflict rapidly approaching, he determined to return to the north, and in 1856, removed to Dubuque, Ia., where he remained for a few years. In 1857, he was married to **Miss Margaret J. Hardy**, of

McVeytown, Mifflin County, Pa., daughter of **William Hardy**, merchant. His wife's sister married **Judge James Carr**, of Paris, Mo., afterward attorney for the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad, and more recently one of the most noted attorneys of St. Louis; an able man and a good lawyer. The sister of **Mrs. Okeson, Elizabeth Hardy**, married **John Jenkins**, Esq., of Juniata County, late recorder for that county, son of **William Jenkins**, an old and much respected citizen of Newton Hamilton. In 1859, a business enterprise induced him to remove to Monroe County, Mo., notwithstanding the possibility of war. Here he settled, but in 1861 the war came on, and in 1862, seeing no alternative but to leave the State or enter the army, he took the latter course. At the solicitation of Governor Gamble, he was induced to accept a colonel's commission and organize a regiment of State troops in the counties of Monroe and Shelby. He organized and commanded the Seventieth Missouri, and was in the field most of the time until the close of the war, in the midst of a deadly foe, in constant danger by day and night. It was certainly no light task, but required great courage and firmness. At the close of the war, he returned with his family to Pennsylvania, and in 1868, at the request of some friends, he was induced to engage in the investigation of what has long been known as the Albertson estate in Holland. In February 1869, a convention of the heirs of said estate met in Pittsburg. Coming from New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Mississippi, Iowa and Canada, they determined to appoint him their attorney to proceed to Amsterdam and ascertain once for all if any such an estate existed or ever had any foundation in fact. To this end he started on his long journey on April 17, 1869, sailing on the "City of Brooklyn," for Liverpool, and arriving in Amsterdam on May 4, 1869. He immediately began his work and spent two months, in which time he made a thorough and complete investigation but found no evidence that any such estate ever existed. It was a final

settlement of that question. After returning from Europe he returned with his family to Illinois and has resided in Chicago since 1879.

**George B. Okeson** was the next child of **William** and **Jane Okeson**. At the age of twenty-two he removed to Lexington, McLean County, Ill., and there engaged in mercantile business for a number of years; when the war came on, he enlisted as captain of a company in the regiment commanded by Col. John McNulty of Bloomington, and went through the war, taking part in many battles in Missouri and the Southwest, under Generals Grant and Banks. He was a good and faithful soldier, and highly esteemed by his men and all who knew him. Although of a stout and rugged constitution, disease from army exposure planted its fangs in his system, and doubtless shortened his life by many years. He died in December, 1888. He was married in 1859 to **Miss Marv Smith**, of Lexington, Ill., who survives him and resides at her home in the town of Lexington. Their children are: **Fannie**, who married B, a very successful physician of San Bernardino, Cal.; **Bessie**, wife of **Dr. Eshbaugh**, of Kankakee, Ill., a man very highly regarded in his profession and a good citizen; and **Dolly**, who lives with her mother.

The last of this family is the only daughter, **Rebecca**, who married **John Harris**, of Columbus, O., in 1854, where she resided until her death in 1881. She had many warm friends and was highly esteemed by all of her acquaintances, as a noble, kind woman. She left no family. Her husband survived her only two years; was a good and excellent citizen.

**Jane Black** was the daughter of **William Black**, the son of **James Black**, who came to this country from Scotland in the year 1735, in company with his brother, **William**, and settled in Cumberland County, now Perry. They were of the old Covenanter stock of Presbyterians. They raised large families; many of their descendants are scattered throughout Ohio, Kentucky, and South Carolina; some of them have become men of note in the affairs of the nation.