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Landmarks of Albany County New York
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JAMES A. MCKOWN.

HON. JAMES A. MCKOWN, who has won for himself a prominent position at the Albany bar, was born in the town of Guilderland, Albany county, N. Y., March 31, 1819. His father was Absalom McKown, a prominent and highly esteemed citizen of Albany county. His mother's maiden name was Edith Le Grange, daughter of John Le Grange, esq., a man of high standing in his day. The advantages of young McKown for obtaining an education were confined principally to the common district school. In his youthful days our present system of general education was unknown and institutions ranking above the common schools were few, but he utilized to the fullest extent every advantage he had. He obtained a very good practical education with which he attained his success in life through his own unaided efforts. He therefore belongs to that large and valuable class of men with which the legal and generally all professions abound—self-made men. He early decided to become a lawyer, and to bring that to pass he directed every energy. In recognition of his intelligence, sound judgment, practical good sense and legal information, he was quite early in life elected a justice of the peace at Guilderland, serving in a very acceptable manner for the almost unprecedented long period of eighteen years. His eminent services as a justice of the peace were fully recognized, not only by the people of Guilderland, but by the people of the county at large, and this, in 1852, brought him forward as a candidate for the office of associate judge of Albany county. He was elected by a good majority and took his seat on the bench of the County Court and Court of Sessions. In 1853 he was again a candidate and was re-elected. His judicial term extended two years, and was very acceptable to the people of the county. Mr. McKown was a close, industrious and appreciative legal student, but he did not apply for admission to the bar until 1853, when, on motion of that distinguished jurist, Hon. John K. Porter, he was admitted to practice in all the courts of this State, and in 1865 he was, on motion of Ira Harris, admitted to the United States Supreme Court. In April, 1856, Mr. McKown made the city of Albany his residence, where he has continued to reside from that time down to the present. His judicial mind and method prepared the way for his election to the office of surrogate of Albany county. This event took place in the fall of 1855. The duties of this office are important and difficult. No judicial position is more so than that of surrogate. It requires a peculiar caste of mind and much depth of learning to successfully discharge the duties of the office. We can truly say that Mr. McKown displayed ability, learning and industry of a high order. His administration was therefore very successful and he retired from the office with the good wishes and good opinion of the bar and the public. In his practice he has no specialty, but has conducted a general legal business with success, and has always surrounded himself with a respectable and profitable clientage. His long identification with the Albany bar, his high and upright character, his honorable course as a practitioner, have given him an eminent place in his profession. Mr. McKown belongs to the Republican party, and though he believes most thoroughly in the principles of that party, yet he is not bigoted. He is not nor ever has been a seeker after office or place. He favors the Baptist church and is a member of Wadsworth Lodge, F. & A. M. In 1837 he was united in marriage to Miss Alida Van Valkenburgh, by whom he has one daughter living, Mrs. William A. Amsdell.