

Cemetery Note: James M. Downey

In the back of the old cemetery, in the last row of standing markers, are ten gravestones for the family of James M. Downey. Downey was a mill owner and was the best-known Unionist political figure in Loudoun County during the Civil War.

James Madison Downey was born in Franklin County, Pa. in 1809. In 1832-33 he attended Pennsylvania College, the Lutheran school now known as Gettysburg College. In 1846, he and his family moved to Washington County, Md., and in 1858, they came to Loudoun County, where he purchased a mill near Taylorstown, which was known variously as the Hamilton, Stoneburner, or Loudoun Mills.



In June 1861 he was elected Magistrate for the Lovettsville precinct, but his election was not confirmed by Governor Letcher because of Downey's vote against secession. In 1863, after the formation of West Virginia, the Unionist areas of Virginia formed the "Restored Government of Virginia," and James Downey was elected Speaker of the House of Delegates. In 1864 he was elected as a Delegate to the Constitutional Convention which drafted a constitution for post-war Virginia. After the collapse of the Confederacy, the Restored Government relocated to Richmond, and Downey gavelled the House to order there on June 19, 1865.

During the war years he often made appeals to officials in Washington to alleviate the harsh conditions facing Union sympathizers in northern Loudoun, who were suffering not only from confiscation of crops and animals, but the embargo on trade. He was arrested a couple of times by Confederates, and once also by Union troops; in that case, he was released one day after he had made a direct appeal to President Lincoln. Because of threats on his life, Downey spent much of the time in Maryland and in Washington D.C.

James Downey and his wife Annie both died in 1881; they and eight of their children are buried in our old cemetery. More next time.