

FRANCIS M. VARDAMAN

Francis M. Vardaman has for forty-five years been a resident of Page county and although for many years connected with agricultural interests is now living retired in the enjoyment of well earned rest, his home being in the village of Shambaugh. He was born in Jefferson county, Iowa, December 22, 1843, and is, therefore, a representative of one of the early families of the state. His parents were George W. and Mary (Elliott) Vardaman, both of whom were natives of Kentucky. The family is of German lineage and was established in America at a very early day by the grandfather of our subject. His son, George Vardaman, the grand-owner George Vardaman was also born in the Blue Grass state and when a young man went to Ohio, where he met and married Miss Mary Elliott, also a native of Kentucky. They became the parents of twelve children: Peter, Nancy, John E., Benjamin W., George W., Jeremiah, Mary, Elizabeth, Francis M., Amanda, Jasper N. and Eliza.

Soon after their marriage the parents removed to Shelby county, Indiana, where the father owned a farm, which he cultivated for several years. For a brief period they were also residents of Illinois and about 1837 took up their abode in Lee county, Iowa. But few white settlers were living within the state at that time, the Indians being more numerous. In fact, Iowa was still under territorial rule and the work of progress and improvement seemed scarcely begun within its borders. At a later day George Vardaman and his family removed to Jefferson county, where he purchased a farm upon which the family remained for some time. His son, F. M. Vardaman, was seven years of age when a removal was made to Benton county, Iowa, and for three years they lived near Vinton. At the end of that time they went to Keokuk county, where they remained for four or five years, later went to Kansas, and from 1854 until 1859 were residents of Taylor county, Iowa. In the latter year they removed to Lawrence county, Missouri, where they located just prior to the outbreak of the Civil war and experienced all of the hardships, dangers and privations that fell to the lot of those who lived on the border where sectional feeling ran very high. In 1864 the father took his family to Minnesota and three years later returned to Jefferson county, Iowa, where he died in 1867. He was a consistent and faithful member of the Christian church and his good qualities won him the esteem and friendly regard of all who knew him. For many years he filled the office of justice of the peace and his decisions were strictly fair and impartial, being always based upon the law and equity of the case.

Francis M. Vardaman was the eleventh in order of birth in a family of twelve children, seven sons and five daughters, of whom one son and three daughters are now living. His brother, George, having enlisted for one hundred days' service in the Civil war, died at Collierville, Tennessee, while at the front. Another brother, Benjamin W., served for three years in the Civil war, enlisting from Taylor county as a member of Company F, Twenty-ninth Iowa Infantry.

F. M. Vardaman accompanied his parents on their various removals until 1864, when he came to Page county, Iowa, where he has since lived. He was then a young man of twenty-one years.



His educational opportunities were limited owing to the fact that they had always lived on the frontier, but, possessing an observing eye and retentive memory, he has added much to his knowledge by observation and reading. When a youth he possessed a delicate constitution and during the period when the family resided on the border was obliged to endure many vicissitudes to which that section of the country was subject. The family were frequently disturbed by people of dissimilar opinion and the sons were frequently compelled to sleep in the brush for safety. At one time the house was surrounded by bushwhackers who made some trouble but were frightened away by a gunshot.

Returning to Iowa in 1864, Mr. Vardaman was for three years employed by the month as a farm hand in Page county. He has always carried on general agricultural pursuits and for many years resided upon the farm in Buchanan township, whereon he took up his abode in 1870. He owns one hundred and fifty-five acres on section 16 and as the years passed his well directed labors brought his fields under a high state of cultivation and made them very productive. He continued to successfully carry on general farming until March, 1898, when he put aside the active work of the fields and came to Shambaugh, purchasing his present place of residence, which consists of a good dwelling in the midst of ten acres of land. His farm is well improved, being one of the best in the township, and all of its modern equipments are the result of the labor and enterprise of the owner. His stock raising the special feature of the place and in that branch of his business was quite successful. The farm is now operated and managed by his sons.

It was in 1867 that Mr. Vardaman was married to Miss Mary Indiana Baker, who was born in Shelby county, Indiana, July 13, 1847, and is a daughter of Peter and Ann (Swiggett) Baker, the former a native of Kentucky and the latter of Indiana. Both died upon a farm near where they settled in East River township. Mr. Baker entered from the government the first piece of land which he ever owned and was identified with the pioneer development and improvement of the county. In his family were four sons and three daughters of whom one died in infancy. Unto Mr. and Mrs. Vardaman have been born six children: Mary Alice, now the wife of Ephraim Warren, a resident of Boulder, Colorado; Erie Ann, The wife of D. A. Pritchard, who lives near Cromwell, Union county, Iowa; Benjamin Rutherford, a resident of Detroit, Michigan; Irma Glen, the wife of Ira Fuller, of Oregon; Avery Earl, who is living on the home place in Buchanan township; and Francis Emmett, who is living on the farm with his brother.

Politically Mr. Vardaman is a republican, conversant with the leading questions and issues of the day. He has served as township trustee and held other local offices, yet is not a politician in the sense of office seeking. Fraternally he is connected with the Masons, belonging to Plumb Lodge, No. 285, A. F. & A. M. of Siam. He has held the offices of trustee and school director and has manifested a deep and helpful interest in educational affairs. He converted his farm from a wild and unimproved tract into one of the valuable and substantial properties of the county and from it he yet derives a substantial income while living retired in Shambaugh. His rest has been well earned and his record proves what may be accomplished when determination and industry are guided by sound business judgment.