

## Andrew Jackson Montague 1862-1937

To the citizens of Danville today, the name Andrew Jackson Montague probably means little. Montague itself is a street in the western section of the city. Yet, less than a century ago, Andrew J. Montague was a rising political figure in the Old Dominion.

Born on October 3, 1862, near Lynchburg in Campbell County to Judge and Mrs. Robert Latane Montague, he attended public and private schools and studied with tutors. At an early age he developed a taste for the best of English literature – historical, biographical, and poetic. Following a year in the grammar school at the College of William and Mary, he entered Richmond College at Richmond, Virginia, and in due time graduated from several of the schools of that institution. While at Richmond College, Mr. Montague distinguished himself as an orator and debater in the literary societies. After graduation, he displayed a great talent for education when he served as a private tutor from 1882-1884. In the summer of 1884 he became a law student at the University of Virginia under Professor John B. Minor, and in 1885 took his Bachelor of Law degree.

It was at that time that Mr. Montague was admitted to the bar and opened his first practice here in Danville on the site where the *Register and Bee* Publishing Company stands today. Three years later his stars began to rise when he undertook defending Charles Slaytor, who had been charged with murdering Richard L. Cohen. Slaytor was admittedly guilty, but Mr. Montague pleaded self-defense in what is recalled as a stirring summation to the jury. The first trial ended in a hung jury, but at the second trial, the defense efforts were successful, and Slaytor was acquitted.

Taking as many small claims cases as he could get, Andrew Montague, who had bright red hair, was like most young attorneys of his day. He was trying to acquire enough money to marry his sweetheart and settle down in Danville, which was then considered the “most flourishing town in the state.” During the year of the Slaytor trial, his income was \$1,500; three years later, in 1891, it had risen to \$4,500, and he built an eight room Queen Ann-style home at 249 West Main Street. The area was described then as near Danville, and in Pittsylvania County. To this house he took his bride, Elizabeth Hoskins, from King and Queen County.

Mr. Montague only ran for public office once in Danville. When he was 26, he ran for Commonwealth’s Attorney. He narrowly lost and felt humiliated because he believed that his opponents used money to buy votes against him. However, he soon found new favor with the Democratic Party in Danville when he was elected president of a pro-Cleveland (Grover Cleveland) democratic club. He toured the Southside making speeches for the Cleveland organization. His oratorical abilities, which first surfaced in the Slaytor trial, were now proven. He was called the “rising orator of Danville.”

On his inauguration as President in 1893, Grover Cleveland appointed Andrew Montague to the Office of District Attorney for Western Virginia. This position gave Montague the chance he needed to expand his influence in the state. In 1897 he was elected Attorney General of the Commonwealth, and then in 1901 he won by a large majority when he was elected Governor of Virginia. During his tenure as Governor, he was called a progressive executive. In large measure, Mr. Montague is credited with awakening interest in the public school system and its substantial development, and it

was through his efforts that the preliminary plan for the nomination of United States senators was adopted. He himself was an unsuccessful candidate for the senate nomination in 1905. In 1905, however, he received his Doctor of Law degree from Brown University.

On leaving the governorship in 1906, Mr. Montague resumed his law practice in Richmond and was selected by President Theodore Roosevelt in May of that year as one of six delegates from the United States to the Third International Conference of American States in Rio de Janeiro. For the ensuing three years after the conference, he served as Dean of Richmond College Law School. He was again tapped to represent the United States at the Third International Conference on Maritime Law in Brussels in 1909 and 1910.

On March 4, 1913, Mr. Montague took his seat in the United States House of Representatives. Elected as a democrat, he served in the House for twelve consecutive terms until his death on January 24, 1937. While a member of the House of Representatives, he held numerous positions: President of the American Society for Judicial Settlement of International Disputes in 1917; President of the American Peace Society from 1920-1924; one of the managers appointed by the House of Representatives in 1926 to conduct impeachment proceedings against George W. English, Judge of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Illinois; President of the Group of the Interparliamentary Union from 1930-1935 and a participant in its sessions at Stockholm, Vienna, Copenhagen, Berne, Washington, Paris, and Berlin; and member of the Council and Executive Committee of the American Institute of Law.

Even though the name of Andrew J. Montague is not a household word now, the man, the "Red Fox," who found Danville such a pleasant place in which to live, must be remembered as one who gave untiringly of himself to aid in molding the United States at a time when it was emerging as a world leader, and it all began with an infant law practice in Danville, Virginia.