



Ross County Contributor

Renick William Dunlap



Renick William Dunlap was a native son of Kingston, Ohio—born on October 21, 1872—whose life and work bridged the worlds of scientific agriculture and public service, leaving a lasting impact on Ross County and the nation. He died in Chillicothe, Ohio on March 2, 1945, and was laid to rest in Mt. Pleasant Presbyterian Cemetery in Kingston.

Dunlap's early life was rooted in the rural traditions of Ross County. The son of Nelson J. Dunlap—a respected farmer and Civil War veteran—he grew up on the family farm where he developed a lifelong interest in agriculture. After completing his local schooling, Renick pursued higher education in agricultural science at Ohio State University, graduating in 1895. While at Ohio State, he was not only a scholar of agriculture but also captain of the Buckeyes football team in his senior year, demonstrating early leadership both in and out of the classroom.

After college, Dunlap returned to the land, applying scientific principles to farming practices that made his operation among the most progressive in the region. His talents soon drew him into public life—he served a term in the Ohio Senate from 1903 to 1905, representing his community at the state level.

Dunlap's expertise in agriculture led to his appointment as Ohio's Dairy and Food Commissioner in 1906, where he worked to improve standards in food production and regulation during a period of rapid change in American agriculture. He went on to serve as Ohio's 13th Secretary of Agriculture, guiding state agricultural policy and supporting farmers through modernization.

In 1925, Dunlap was appointed Assistant Secretary of Agriculture in the U.S. Department of Agriculture—a position he held through 1933 under Presidents Calvin Coolidge and Herbert Hoover. During his tenure in Washington, he became nationally known for his vigorous enforcement of the Pure Food and Drug Act, the landmark federal law originally passed in 1906 to protect consumers from adulterated or mislabeled foods and drugs. His leadership helped strengthen the effectiveness of the Act at a time when food safety was emerging as a critical public issue and laid groundwork for the modern Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

After leaving federal service during the Great Depression, Dunlap returned to Ross County and resumed farming—applying his scientific knowledge and decades of public experience to his own land. Throughout his life and career he remained dedicated to improving agricultural practices, protecting public health, and serving his community with distinction.

Renick William Dunlap's contributions reflect both his deep roots in Ohio's agricultural heritage and his role in shaping national standards for food safety and agricultural policy—an enduring legacy for Ross County and beyond.