

HISTORY
OF THE
COUNTY OF WESTMORELAND,
PENNSYLVANIA,
WITH
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES
OF MANY OF ITS
PIONEERS AND PROMINENT MEN.

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HON. JOHN COVODE.

THE Hon. John Covode was one of the most remarkable men whom Pennsylvania has ever produced. It is not the purpose of this sketch to present a minute record of his life, tell "the long story of struggles and triumphs" which marked his way from boyhood to the grave, and go into the analysis of his character by the comparison of it with that of other men of force and distinction, or speculate upon the value of Mr. Covode's services to his constituents and the country during his congressional career. A plain statement of the most prominent facts of his career must for the most part suffice the reader of this.

Mr. Covode, who died Jan. 11, 1870, was born in Westmoreland County, March 17, 1808. His father was Jacob Covode, a son of Garret Covode, a native of Holland, who was, when a child, kidnapped in the streets of Amsterdam by a sea-captain, who brought him to Philadelphia, and under then existing laws sold him into bondage as a "redemptionner," in which condition he was held for some years after arriving at manhood, and was employed as a domestic servant in the household of Gen. Washington. He died in 1826 at the advanced age of ninety-four years. The

name of Garret Covode does not necessarily represent that of the Hollandish family from which he was born, for it was coined or originated by the sea-captain who stole him, and by him conferred upon the boy.

The mother of John Covode, and whose maiden name was Updegraff, was a Quaker, and it is among the traditions of her family that two of her ancestors, together with a person named Wood, prepared and published a protest against the decision of William Penn recognizing the legality of negro slavery. This protest is said to have been the first anti-slavery manifesto published in this country.

Mr. Covode received only a limited education in the schools. He was brought up on a farm, and afterwards learned the trade of woolen manufacturing, which business he conducted for forty years, but he pursued other avocations at the same time. He was a contractor early in life, connected with the public works of the State, was one of the first to encourage the building of the State canal, and after its completion he engaged in the transportation business, and commanded the first section boat which went over it from Philadelphia to the interior of Ohio. In short, his was an active, earnest life of varied labor before he became a public man, as well as after he entered upon the career of politics which made his fame national.

The first note we have regarding Mr. Covode as a candidate for political office indicates the date of 1845, and states that he was then the Whig candidate for the State Senate in a very strong Democratic district, and that the second time he was nominated he came so near being elected that the Democracy, then in power in the State, alarmed at his growing popularity, changed his district. He was then taken up by his party and was elected to Congress in 1854 from the Twentieth District, and was re-elected in 1856, 1858, and 1860. In 1866 and in 1868 he was sent to Congress from the Twenty-first District (under the new apportionment). In 1860 he was a prominent candidate for nomination for Governor, and also in 1863. In 1860 he was president of the convention that nominated Governor Geary. In 1869 he was chairman of the Republican State Committee, and held that position when he died.

Mr. Covode was conspicuous in connection with stirring events prior to and throughout the period of the Rebellion. As chairman of the Lecompton Investigating Committee in 1858 he won a national reputation, which was made more secure by his services as member of the committee of Congress to inquire into the conduct of the war, and by his conspicuous and valuable services in support of the government. Few men labored as zealously as did he in behalf of the government during the trying times of the Rebellion, or had better knowledge than had he of the interior workings of the immense enginery employed by the government to suppress the Rebellion.

He had the confidence of many of the most important actors in that eventful period, and by his great energy, quick perception, and knowledge of human character was able to render many important services to the nation, which were recognized and appreciated by those in power.

Mr. Covode was a man of strong sense, and possessed the faculty of combination to an unusual degree; that is, he was what is known in the vernacular of politicians as a "wire-puller" of extraordinary capacity; could pull more wires, and pull them more persistently and cleverly, than most men. He was fruitful in resources and untiring in whatever he undertook. He was a good neighbor and a fast friend.