

HISTORY
OF
FAYETTE COUNTY,
PENNSYLVANIA,
WITH
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

OF MANY OF ITS

PIONEERS AND PROMINENT MEN.

EDITED BY
FRANKLIN ELLIS.

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DANIEL ROGERS DAVIDSON.

Somewhere in Beaver County, Pa., near Brighton, we believe, now resides, and of Pittsburgh makes his business centre, Col. Daniel R. Davidson, who belongs rather to the State of Pennsylvania than to Fayette County, in which he was born, and where he passed perhaps fifty years of residence, and in which county he still holds large business and proprietary interests and spends considerable time, a sketch of whom it is our lot to prepare for the history of Fayette County.

Mr. Davidson took great interest in the history of his native county during its preparation for the press, and rendered willing aid to those who were engaged in it whenever he could, contributing to whatever department of the work he was requested to assist in until a biography of himself was demanded, when the proposing interviewer was met with the polite but positive refusal of Mr. Davidson to furnish any item whatever regarding himself, he easily baffling the inquirer with the naïve remark that he never knew

anything about himself, never understood himself as boy or man, and could not, therefore, say anything of himself; in fact, he would prefer that nothing be said, and he left no uncertainty about his quiet but firm declaration that whatever might be written of him for the history must be obtained from others. However, persistent inquiry evoked from him the statement that he believed himself to have been born at Connellsville, Jan. 12, 1820; but subsequent inquiry of others casts doubt upon this date, and leaves the writer unable to say whether Mr. Davidson was born a year or two before or a year or two after that time.

Mr. Davidson is so markedly *sui generis* in character, as everybody who has his acquaintance knows, or should know, that it is quite unessential to mention herein, as in biographical sketches in general, the mortal stock of which he is a derivative; and yet it would seem that somewhat of his physical and spiritual nature is inherited; as his father, the late Hon. William Davidson, of Connellsville, is represented by old citizens who knew him well as a man of large mould and extraordinary mental powers, as well as of a very sensitive and potent moral nature (mixed with a degree of religious sentiment which in the last years of his life made him an extreme though consistent zealot); while his mother, Sarah Rogers, some years since deceased, is pictured as a lady of remarkable gifts, a woman of great energy and extreme perspicacity.

William Davidson was born in Carlisle, Cumberland Co., Pa., Feb. 14, 1783, and came into Fayette County about 1808. He was at first manager of the Laurel Furnace, and afterwards an iron-master at Break Neck. He was several times a member of the State Legislature, at one time president of the House, and was also a member of the Senate. He was highly esteemed as an active, intelligent, and honest legislator. It appears that the first or immigrant Davidson ancestor of William, came from the north of Ireland and lived in Londonderry during the famous siege.

Mr. and Mrs. William Davidson were the parents of three sons and two daughters. Daniel R. was their fourth child. It is learned that he went to a common school in his extreme young years; but he was never known by his schoolmates to study anything. The every-day mystery to them was how, without study, "Dan" got to know more about everything than did they who studied hard. Of course the boys he played with had no capacities to comprehend him. They knew nothing of him any more than they did about the mysteries of the attraction of gravitation when they fell off the dunce-block, or why the water ran down the Youghiogheny, gliding past their school-house.

Frank always, but not bold in utterance, Daniel Davidson grew up to sixteen years of age, as little understood by his father, it is evident (and perhaps by his mother too), as he understood himself; and the

fear being that this uncomprehended boy would never amount to anything of himself, and would ever be "a ne'er-do-well," he was at that age taken from the school which he cannot be said to have "attended" and banished "from Rome,"—that is, sent into quarters over which the central power or home government held empire, but of which the boy was given experimental charge,—a sort of procuratorship. It was an act of despair on the part of his father when he made, as he thought, a fixture of Dan on the Davidson farm, north of the borough of Connellsville, which farm it was supposed Dan would need all his life to glean necessary food from. So little did the paternal mind understand the boy. But, lo! Dan, who now had a world of his own to move in, at once began to exhibit extraordinary executive ability. He greatly improved the farm, and reaped a revenue from it which surprised everybody; and then it was that his career commenced. The peculiar, great-souled boy had with one stride stepped from youth to mature manhood, and was already putting to himself large problems of a practical character, and projecting in his clear head how they should be solved,—problems concerning the public weal and involving the elements of his own private fortune.

It was at this time of his life, when near twenty-one years of age, that he became interested in the project of a railroad from Pittsburgh to Connellsville (the present Pittsburgh Division of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad). He threw his great energy into that matter, against the advice and solicitation of his hopeless friends and even the demands of his father, the people regarding him as little less than wild. But he kept straight on courageously and with immense industry in his course. He foresaw what none others perceived, the vast advantages to the county and to himself of the project; and tirelessly he pursued his path, securing rights of way from this and that one through his earnest eloquence in picturing the bright future, and from others by sagacious conditional bargains; and got charters, too, by piecemeal, fighting and out-plotting all the old heads in opposition. He, let it be remembered, was the only man (and then an untried boy) who had the energy to do this tremendous work. At this matter of the railroad he spent some five years, not, however, neglecting his farm improvement and culture, and attending meanwhile to other important things which had come to his hands to do. At last the road was built and equipped. Crowds gathered at Connellsville on the day on which the first train ran into the borough, bearing an illustrious Pennsylvania protectionist on the running-board of the engine, and by his side Daniel Davidson, who, as the train stopped in the midst of the people, shouted, "Here's the end of the Pittsburgh Road, with 'Tariff Andy' on its back!" and the doubters, who of course jeered and condemned him years before, now also of course applauded him to the echo, and literally bared their

heads before him. Cannon were fired, and the great uproar of praise shook the sky. William Davidson, the father of Dan, the banished, "luckless wight," looked on in silence that day, and then turned away, walking speechless into his house near by. Perhaps he grieved over his wild boy's victory, perhaps he was proud. Since that day sensible people have not questioned Daniel Davidson's judgment, his prognostic powers, his great capacity and energy.

From this point on, we might proceed recounting the struggles and conquests of this man, but our space is too limited to permit much detail. Many have not forgotten the time, not long after the railroad was finished, when a mob of Connellsville people of "high respectability" threatened dire things against Mr. Davidson on account of sundry bonds connected with the building of the road, and to pay money loaned on which, to the matter of twenty thousand dollars or so, it was feared they were to be heavily taxed. How they raged and fumed is a matter of history, as well as how Dan laid a plan by which they were lightly taxed, and the bonds gotten back by him into their hands in indemnity, they severally receiving bonds in proportion to the amount of their taxes; and how some tore theirs up or burned them in rage and contempt and punished themselves, while others kept theirs and eventually profited by them some six hundred per cent.

And while we are talking of railways, it must not be forgotten that in later years it was this same Dan who was a principal promoter of the Fayette County Railroad, which took the county-seat and its adjuncts out of the night of decay that was settling down upon them and gave them new life, while many gave him the encouragement of gibes and scoffs, sneeringly declaring that a four-horse coach could carry all the passengers the railroad would ever convey! The county also owes to Mr. Davidson more than to any other man the advantages which she has for years enjoyed through the Southwest Pennsylvania Railroad. He was the originator of the project of its building, rendered indispensable services in obtaining its charter or charters, and gave his time and talents whenever needed to the work.

Mr. Davidson resided for years on his farm near Connellsville, and became universally sought for counsel in business, politics, and confidential affairs. It is probable that he settled more neighborhood and domestic difficulties than did all other men during his time in Connellsville. In politics he became a great diplomatist. In extensive and subtle combinations in political fields, in making men see things as he saw them, and in pointing out the way to easy, safe, and self-sustaining victories, he became recognized among leaders as a power long before the gray hairs began to creep into his locks. He liked politics intensely for the field it opened for the play of his forces, but he cared not for office. Indeed, he has been pressed to take important offices, but has always refused.

Before Mr. Davidson left his farm as a place of family residence, indeed early in life, he foresaw what a mighty work would yet be done in the coking coal fields of Fayette County. We cannot go into detail here, but it is meet that we make note that he started in the business (first helping others to enter upon it before seeking to secure especial advantages to himself, however) when everybody said he was crazy for so doing. (He has always been "insane!") He was one of the great prime movers in the vast enterprise of developing on a huge scale the mineral resources of the county; indeed, he was the one intellectual power which moved it. Others furnished brawn and ignorant energy. In his time he has owned more extensive coking coal lands than any one else who can be named. In the measure of upbuilding the business of Fayette County through her coal-beds, he ran against the popular "judgment," as he had done in many other matters, but, as in this case, he always carried his measures to final popular approval and indorsement.

But we are giving this article the full length of a preface to the book which might be written of the man and the great part which Daniel Davidson has played in the world, and when we took up our pen we had no purpose to do more than make a synopsis of a preface; but the subject is an inspiring one, and the material concerning it voluminous. The labor is not in expanding but in coming to a halt; for every year of Davidson's life for the last four decades would build a volume of record. It is not easy to biographize the living, since regarding them one may not be so direct and personal as if talking of the dead. Too much truth about either, a stupid public (general readers) will not usually bear, but whoever shall live to write of Davidson when he shall have gone will have a subject full worthy of the greatest pen, and may write the full truth about whatever may be his faults and failings; but to the writer of this Mr. Davidson's faults seem quite unworthy of notice, as really no part of him,—incidents of his life, not outgrowths of his character, not of the man any more than his worn-out and torn boots or old coat. There are some men whom faults do not blemish more than do spots of thin rust a tried Toledo blade. They are the current records or telling symbols, not vital parts of a great life of sturdy warfare. Indeed, there have been and are men whom crimes do not sully. Bacon was one of them. But meannesses too low for the law to classify into misdemeanors even, these are the things which stain the soul, or the rather, they are the exponents of essential natures, proofs that the soul guilty of enacting them is not great, whatever the man's frontispiece before the world. Of such the world accuses not Davidson; and while the history of Fayette County will be searched in vain in the chapters of her illustrious dead for one native born the superior of Davidson in all that goes to make great manhood, so among the living of Fayette County

and of Western Pennsylvania a similar search would surely also be vain. He has once been aspersed and thrust into the civil courts, and he came out thoroughly a victor, and justly and nobly triumphant over the attempted wrong and persecution.

Mr. Davidson has a wide acquaintanceship among the leading men of the country, especially those of the South and West, and commands their esteem, as he does that of the people of his own State. Where, when, or how in his strong-willed, successful career he has gathered to himself the funds of information which he possesses upon many topics is unknown to the writer, for he cannot learn that Mr. Davidson has been a close student of books. But Carlyle, it is said, could exhaust five octavo volumes a day. He turned over the leaves of a book, read here and there a page, caught the key-note, and saw the manner of treatment of a subject, and could talk more wisely than of the book than another man who had spent three weeks in reading it. Mr. Davidson evidently possesses some such power or art, and we are told that his memory is prodigious. But over all his powerful, logical brain reigns; and we are inclined to think that out of the depths of his own being, by the accretions of his own mind, more than from acquisitions of any sort, is it that the successes of Daniel Davidson have been builded. But however made, or created, or modified, sure it is that no son of Fayette County was ever his superior in intellectual and moral forces, in mental equipoise, in quiet but tremendous energy given to great works of a practical character for the well-being of the county; in that mental forecast which amounts to prophecy in the power to move and persuade men by gentle means, opening their eyes that they may see, and, seeing, believe the things in practical life hidden to them, but clear to his keen vision. In these and many other things Davidson stands unsurpassed, felt as to his power in every part of the county, but yet "unknown," save only to the wise few, but by them understood but partially, and careless, we think, as to whether or not he shall ever be understood by the masses.
