

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

EDITED BY
FRANKLIN ELLIS.

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ROBERT HOGSETT.

Robert Hogsett is the most remarkable man in Fayette County in this, that he has wrought out by his own unaided efforts a larger fortune than any other citizen of the county. Others may possess more wealth, but cannot say as Hogsett can, "I made it all myself."

Robert Hogsett was born in Menallen township, March 2, 1820. His father, James Hogsett, was a north of Ireland man, and emigrated to America some time during the early part of the present century. There was nothing about him to distinguish him from his fellow-men, and he died in North Union township, near Uniontown, about the year 1850, going out of the world as he had lived in it, a poor but honest man. He did not live to see his son take as much as the initial step towards that distinguished rank in business and financial affairs which he now admittedly holds, but he left the world peacefully for all that, confidently believing that all his children would be able to hold their own in life's great battle. Robert Hogsett's mother was a daughter of Robert Jackson, of the old Jackson family of Menallen township, who organized Grace Church, near Searight's, the oldest Episcopal Church in the county. At the early age of twelve years Robert was hired out to work for such persons as would employ him, and for such wages as could be obtained for him. His first engagement was with Job Wheatley, a farmer, living about one and a half miles northwardly from Searight's. He remained with Wheatley but a short time, doing such work as is within the scope and power of a twelve years old boy. Upon quitting Wheatley's service he went to breaking stones on the old National road, a common thing with boys, and men as well, at that day. There are many old men in Fayette County who when boys and young men broke stones on the old pike. Young Hogsett remained on the road wielding the well-remembered little round napping-hammer every day for five years, and until he reached the age of seventeen, breaking from two to five perches of stones a day, at twelve and a half cents (called a "levy") per perch. Becoming tired of the monotony of the napping-hammer, he entered into an engagement with Joseph Strickler, who was running "the old Evans mill" on the farm, or rather large plantation of Col. Samuel Evans, in North Union township. Besides running the mill Strickler farmed a portion of the Evans land. Strickler was quite a prominent and active business man in his day, and was among the first men of Fayette County who gave attention to the feeding of cattle for the Eastern markets. The Evans mill was destroyed by fire while Robert Hogsett was serving for Strickler, but at the time of the burning Hogsett was not working in the mill, but on the Evans farm at farm-work. While in the mill, Hogsett for the most part had charge of the engine, but his duties were multifarious, and he did many things in and about the mill, such as carrying bags of grain from wagons, placing grists on the backs of horses and tossing boys upon them, and starting them home to gladden their parents' hearts with fresh No. 1 flour and the usual allowance of bran and shorts to make slop for the cows. After the Evans mill burnt down Strickler bought Vance's mill, on Redstone Creek, three miles

below Uniontown, which he refitted and operated. This mill is still standing and doing work. Robert Hogsett went with Strickler to Vance's mill. He drove the team that hauled the machinery from the burnt mill to Vance's, a work that occupied him many days. Joseph Strickler had the misfortune to lose his eyesight. After he became blind he removed to the State of Missouri and died there. Mr. Hogsett always speaks in kind terms of Joseph Strickler, and says he was a good man.

While engaged in the milling business, Mr. Hogsett, by reason of exposure to all kinds of weather, contracted quinsy, a complaint that pains him with periodically recurring attacks to this day. He remained with Strickler eight years, and until he reached the age of twenty-five. During this period his wages never exceeded one hundred and twenty dollars per year, a rate, however, which at that day was considered high for labor. After quitting the service of Strickler he went to work for Mrs. Sampey, the widow of James Sampey, of Mount Washington. His duties under this engagement were to manage the large mountain farm upon which old Fort Necessity is located; to make all he could out of it for his employer, and likewise to superintend the hotel at that place, over which Mrs. Sampey presided as landlady and hostess. This hotel was a stage-stand at which the "Good Intent" line of stage-coaches, running on the National road, kept relays of teams, and passengers frequently stopped there for meals. There were nine stage-teams standing at the Mount Washington stables all the time. Mr. Hogsett engaged but for a single year with Mrs. Sampey, and in the year cleared for her and paid over to her the handsome sum of four thousand dollars. Now Hogsett had reached an age at which he was ambitious to own something himself. His first thought after resolving to make a home for himself that he could call his own was to obtain a good wife. And here the genius of good luck first perched upon his banner, and led him to woo and wed a daughter of John F. Foster, of North Union township. Mr. Foster owned a small but productive farm near Uniontown, and Robert Hogsett, soon after his marriage, rented this farm and set up for himself and his wife. He operated this farm as tenant of his father-in-law for about two years, and then bought it. It contained one hundred acres, and was the first real estate that Robert Hogsett ever owned, and he owns it to this day, and lives within a few steps of its boundaries. This purchase was made about the year 1848.

It will be seen that at this date, while Mr. Hogsett had displayed indomitable energy and industry, as well as close economy, his earnings were inadequate to the purchase of a farm even of small proportions and at a small price, the best average farm in Fayette County at that time rating only at about fifty dollars per acre; and that was the price he paid for the farm of his father-in-law. But owing to the relationship

between the grantor and grantee, the latter, of course, obtained favorable terms. His industrious and economical habits, however, soon enabled him to acquire a sufficient sum of money to pay for this farm in full, when he got his deed, and stood forth for the first time a freeholder. When he commenced farming for himself as lessee on his father-in-law's land, his whole outfit consisted of two poor horses and one old sled. As he pushed along he added to his stock, and soon became the owner of an ordinary farm team. It was his practice at this period to haul the grain he raised into the mountains and sell it to the tavern-keepers on the old National road, which was then a crowded thoroughfare; and such indeed was the practice of nearly all the farmers in the neighborhood of Uniontown and many portions of Fayette County.

The National road furnished a ready market for all kinds of farm produce, and the mountains being remote from the rich agricultural lands better prices were obtained there than "in the settlement," as the region west of Laurel Hill was called. After disposing of a load of grain the farmer proceeded with his team to Cumberland, and returned with a load of merchandise to Brownsville or Wheeling, for the transportation of which he obtained remunerative prices, and thus was enabled to make profitable trips. It was always considered an indispensable matter to secure what was called a "back load." Farmers thus employed were called "sharpshooters," a term used to distinguish them from the "regulars," as those were called who made transportation a regular business. Robert Hogsett was therefore called a "sharpshooter," but he little heeded "nicknames" so long as he pursued an honest calling and obtained an honest living. He was utterly oblivious to everything but the accomplishment of his aims and purposes, always pursuing them, however, with the strictest regard for honesty and propriety.

It may be said that the turning-point of Mr. Hogsett's wonderfully successful career was his marriage with Miss Foster and the purchase of her father's farm. After that he moved forward slowly and cautiously at first, but always making his points with certainty. Honesty, industry, and frugality were his dominant characteristics, and these when combined, rarely fail to bring success to any man who has the good fortune to possess them.

For many years after he became settled on his own homestead Robert Hogsett devoted himself exclusively to legitimate farming and stock-raising pursuits, which brought him large profits, owing mainly to his judicious management. In 1858-59, when the first railroad was built to Uniontown, called the Fayette County road, he took a contract for construction, and completed it with characteristic energy and promptitude; and upon the completion of the road, at the urgent solicitation of the directors, he consented to serve as superintendent, a position he held but a short time, not fancying the railroad business, and possessing too much

business talent to be wasted on a twelve-mile branch. He is now, however, a director in the Southwest Railroad Company, a position he has held from the first organization of that company. Soon after the construction of the Fayette County road, above mentioned, he purchased the Isaac Wood tract of land, near Mount Braddock, a large farm underlaid with the nine-foot vein of coking coal. He moved on to this farm and lived on it a number of years, leaving the old Foster farm in charge of one of his now grown-up sons. He subsequently purchased the Jacob Murphy farm, adjoining the Wood farm, and also underlaid with the big vein of coking coal. Here he erected coke ovens, and operated them a number of years with his customary success. He recently sold these works and the coal adjacent for a large sum of money, sufficient of itself to constitute an ordinary fortune. He next bought the Judge Nathaniel Ewing farm, one mile north of Uniontown, on which he at present resides. Altogether, he is at this time the owner of four thousand eight hundred acres of land, twelve hundred of which lie in the county of Logan, Ohio, of excellent quality for farming and grazing. He has three thousand six hundred acres in Fayette County, all of the best quality of farming land, and underlaid with the celebrated Connellsville vein of coking coal, except eight or nine hundred acres of mountain range.

He is also the owner of a one-half interest in the Lemont Furnace, which has a daily capacity of forty tons, and he personally manages the affairs of this furnace, in addition to bestowing careful attention upon his extensive farming and stock-raising interests. And this colossal fortune was made in a few years by a man who started out in the world with nothing to assist him but willing hands, a clear head, and an honest heart. Robert Hogsett is small in stature, and wears a full beard. While he is not a member of any church, he is temperate and exemplary in his habits. He never indulges in profanity, nor does he use tobacco in any form. All his life he has followed the precept of the maxim, "Early to bed and early to rise;" and if the practice of this precept has not made him healthy, it has at least made him wealthy and wise. Without opportunity of going to school in early life, as has been seen, his education is limited to the rudiments of book learning, and he has probably never seen the following lines, although his career is a perfect illustration of the truthfulness of the sentiment they contain, viz.:

"The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were towering upwards in the night."

Robert Hogsett is utterly indifferent to the gilded signs of fashion and fancy. A brass band on the street makes no more impression upon him than the murmuring of the rivulet that threads its course through one of his rich meadows. He pays no attention to "side-shows," but never misses the "main

chance." It must not be inferred from this, however, that he is lacking in hospitality or generosity. On the contrary, he lives well, and no man greets or entertains his friends with warmer cordiality. When at home, released from the anxious cares of business engagements almost constantly pressing upon him, he delights in receiving the calls of his neighbors and friends, and derives pleasure in talking with them on the common topics of the hour. With all his good fortune he has suffered one sad misfortune, the death a few years ago of his wife, Jane Foster. But Providence, as if unwilling that the even current of his successful life should seem to be broken or perturbed, sent him another wife in the person of Susan Allen, one of the most excellent ladies of Fayette County.
