

ENCYCLOPÆDIA  
OF  
CONTEMPORARY BIOGRAPHY,  
OF  
PENNSYLVANIA.

VOL. 1.

---

ILLUSTRATED WITH PORTRAITS ON STEEL.

---

NEW YORK.  
ATLANTIC PUBLISHING & ENGRAVING COMPANY.

1889.

---

### JOHN FLENNIKEN JENNINGS.

JOHN FLENNIKEN JENNINGS, one of the pioneers in the great steel industry of Pittsburgh, and for more than half a century prominently identified with the development and business interests of that city, was born at Waynesburg, Greene County, Pennsylvania, October 28, 1807, and died at Allegheny City in the same State, March 8, 1888. On the maternal side he came of distinguished Revolutionary ancestry. His mother's father, John Flenniken, was a Pennsylvanian by birth, but for many years—including the whole period of the War for Independence—resided in North Carolina. He was a man of high character and positive influence, and a pronounced advocate of resistance to the aggressive policy of England. Sent as a delegate from his district to the famous Mechlenburg Convention of 1775, he had the high honor of being one of the

signers of the immortal "Declaration of Independence" issued by that body. During the war he served gallantly in the historic corps known as "General Marion's Minute Men," and at its close, having lost his wife by death, returned to his native State, taking with him his two children, a son and a daughter, and settled permanently in Greene County. He was afterwards appointed one of the first Associate Judges of that county, and discharged the responsible duties of that position with honor and fidelity for a number of years. Mr. Jennings' paternal grandfather was Jacob Jennings, of New Jersey, who removed from that State to Pennsylvania about the middle of the eighteenth century, and settled on a farm on the west side of the Monongahela River. The latter's son, Benjamin Jennings, married the daughter of Judge Flenniken. He was one of the earliest settlers in Waynesburgh, the seat of Greene County, and being a skillful carpenter, assisted in building the first court house erected, (which was constructed of logs). Later, having bought two lots on Main street, he built two frame houses. During the progress of this work, his son John F., the subject of this sketch, was born "in the little log house that stood on what is now Greene street," this being the only habitation in which Benjamin Jennings and his young bride could find accommodation upon their arrival in the place. At the age of fifteen years, John F. Jennings began his business career as a clerk in the village store, but in a few months left his employment to enter a printing office with a view of learning the trade. He had not previously had much opportunity for acquiring any education or training, but he now employed his spare time to advantage and soon mastered the rudiments of English. His knowledge of grammar was obtained by attending night school. When he had served his apprenticeship to printing, he was induced to accept a remunerative position in the largest general store in the town of Waynesburgh, and during his service of three years in that capacity added materially to his knowledge of business affairs. Failing health caused him to relinquish this clerkship in 1830, and going to St. Clairsville, Ohio, he ran across George W. Manypenny, an old "office mate"—as printers say—who had just purchased a newspaper and was in urgent need of assistance. He remained with Col. Manypenny about a year and then took a position in an office in Columbus, Ohio, where he spent another year, devoted partly to his trade, in which he was a master workman, and partly to reporting the proceedings of the General Assembly. Declining the position of foreman in this establishment, he went back to St. Clairsville, where he spent a

few months, and then, in the spring of 1833, removed to Pittsburgh, where he speedily found work at his trade and became, two years later, foreman of a large office. Early in 1837 he accepted the position of book-keeper and general manager of the Eagle Cotton Works, then "one of the largest factories in Allegheny, where all the factories of that section were located, and doing an immense business." Six years later, having now considerably increased the little fund of forty-five dollars which represented his capital when he entered Pittsburgh, he embarked in the wholesale grocery business with James W. Hailman and John R. Blaine, under the style of Hailman, Jennings & Co. The firm had succeeded in building up a good trade, and was fairly launched in a career of prosperity and profit when it was suddenly overtaken by the disastrous conflagration of April 10, 1845, which destroyed fully three-quarters of the business portion of the city of Pittsburgh, and resulted in a loss of ten millions of dollars to the business community. This calamity not only ruined the firm and caused its dissolution, but left it several thousand dollars in debt. In the winter following, Mr. Jennings, whose attention had been drawn to the possibilities of the manufacture of steel, became associated with William Coleman and Samuel H. Hartman in that industry. Although the enterprise was comparatively a new one, and had to overcome a prejudice which existed in favor of the English product, the prospects were remarkably good. Nevertheless, the relations did not prove harmonious, and Mr. Jennings disposed of his interest at a fair profit, and after paying all his outstanding debts from the sum realized, found himself still in possession of considerable capital. Convinced that the steel industry had a great future, he lost no time in organizing a company for the manufacture of steel and of articles produced from it, his associates when the business went into operation being A. M. Wallingford, John F. Singer, W. K. Nimick, Alexander Nimick, Samuel H. Hartman and Felix R. Brunot. This company took the name of Singer, Hartman & Co. Mr. Jennings, with Mr. Singer and Mr. Hartman, operated the concern, which soon became famous as the "Sheffield Steel Works." The product of the company was a good steel, which found ready sale at remunerative prices. A profitable branch of the business was the manufacture of plow steel slabs. The mill expressly fitted up for this purpose was utilized in slack time for the making of boiler-plate and sheet-iron. Other manufactures were carriage and buggy tires, crowbars, sledges, picks, springs, axles, etc., etc. "Bliester steel was the only kind then attempted in Pitts-

burgh, and the spring steel was made from the blister." The plan employed in these mills "was the old English process of conversion." Alternate layers of ground charcoal and iron bars were placed in a furnace constructed for the purpose and the heat raised gradually to the standard (ten thousand degrees), was maintained steadily at that point for seven or eight days. Afterwards several days were employed in "cooling," and the product, at this point known as "blister steel," by being heated and rolled to the required thickness, made spring or plow steel, or being broken up into small pieces and melted in crucibles, became cast steel. Chemical processes now render possible in a few hours what formerly occupied so much time and labor, and in consequence these old methods have been almost entirely abandoned. Among the valuable services rendered to the steel industry by Mr. Jennings was the invention and successful introduction of improvements in the mode of supplying the plow-makers with steel, which greatly increased the profits of the mills, yet at the same time effected a large saving to the plow manufacturers throughout the country. These improvements consisted in cutting to shape the mould boards at the mills, thereby saving labor, fuel, time and freight to the plow-makers generally. In 1859, the company, which had been the first to begin the manufacture of steel on an extensive scale, was reorganized under the style of Singer, Nimick & Co., and is still engaged in the business, having one of the largest plants in the United States. In 1862 Mr. Jennings sold out his interest in the works, and although a busy man in numerous ways, did not during the remaining twenty-five years of his life engage in any active business enterprises. During the War of the Rebellion Mr. Jennings devoted himself heart and soul to the support of the National Government. He was particularly active and efficient in raising troops, and had the supreme satisfaction of seeing his three sons all enter the field in support of the Union cause, the eldest, Benjamin F. Jennings, a young man of twenty-two or three, winning a captaincy before coming home with the company which he helped to raise and which he went out with in the One Hundred and Fifty-fifth Volunteers as Lieutenant; and William K. and Thomas D., the two younger, although mere boys, serving a term with the contingent called out in 1864 for "one hundred days." At the time Lee's invasion of Pennsylvania was agitating the North, Mr. Jennings personally took the field with a body of young men he had assisted in raising, and remained with them several weeks. This he did unofficially, but willingly, upon being assured of the moral effect of his

presence. In a number of ways during the struggle Mr. Jennings proved his patriotism. "He was one of General Howe's most efficient allies in keeping Western Pennsylvania alive to her full duty in those trying hours," and was in close communication with many leading military men. He was one of the organizers and a life-long member of the Union League in Pennsylvania, and prominent in its local, State and National councils. His time, influence and money were freely given in support of the National Government, and he was so active in patriotic work that towards the close of the war he fell seriously ill and for a time was in a critical condition. An active Republican in politics, he worked faithfully for the success of his party, but never consented to accept any office. A business position which he held many years was that of Vice-President of the Cash Insurance Company. He was a sincere Christian, and for forty years an honored and consistent member of the Second Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh, and a large portion of that period a member of its Board of Trustees. Mr. Jennings married, on March 29, 1836, Miss Elizabeth B. Fitzgerald, daughter of Michael Fitzgerald, at the time a prominent silversmith of Pittsburgh. Of the five children born to this union four are now living, the three sons named above, all prominent in Pittsburgh business circles, and one daughter, Mrs. Wm. H. Burt. Mrs. Jennings was her husband's faithful companion and earnest supporter in religious and patriotic work for nearly half a century. She died, sincerely mourned, February 5, 1883. For several years previous to his own death Mr. Jennings had been in failing health. Nevertheless, he reached the ripe age of eighty-one years, and may be said to have died of old age. His career was an eminently useful one in every respect, and he left to posterity a fine example of citizenship and a spotless record.

---

## BENJAMIN F. JENNINGS.

BENJAMIN FITZGERALD JENNINGS, a prominent manufacturer of Pittsburgh and eldest son of the foregoing, was born in Allegheny City, September 9, 1838. He was educated in the local public schools and at the University of Western Pennsylvania. In 1856, two years after entering the University, he accepted the position of book-keeper in the then extensive steel manufacturing concern of Singer, Hartman & Co., of which his father was a partner. This position, which had been made vacant suddenly by the illness of the gentleman who

had held it, was only to be filled temporarily, and when young Mr. Jennings assumed its duties, he did so with the intention of returning to college to graduate. Nevertheless, he became absorbed in the work and continued in it until the summer of 1862. From the beginning of the Civil War he had found it extremely difficult to repress his patriotic instincts, but as a great deal depended upon him in a business way, he continued at his desk, attending to duties which with each succeeding year became more and more responsible. The stirring events of 1862, and the urgent need of increasing the number of troops in the field, at length decided him to lose no time in entering the army, and in August of that year he gave up business to engage in the work of recruiting. His patriotic and well directed efforts resulted in the enlistment of B Company, One Hundred and Fifty-fifth Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers, for three years. Commissioned as Second Lieutenant in the company formed from these recruits, he took the field with it, and in November following was promoted to be its First Lieutenant. His regiment was attached to the Army of the Potomac, and with it he saw service in both Maryland and Virginia, and took part in the second battle of Bull Run, and the subsequent battles of the Army of the Potomac to Chancellorsville. In 1863 he had won the captaincy of his company, but owing to failing health was compelled to resign his commission and return home. In 1864 he engaged in the manufacture of machinery at Allegheny, under the firm name of Jennings & Co., and for four years was thus employed with gratifying success. In 1868 poor health obliged him to give up business, but in 1872 he became concerned in the manufacture of steel, as a partner in the firm of Reiter, Sutton & Co., which two years afterwards took the style of Smith, Sutton & Co. Mr. Jennings continued a member of this firm until 1885, when both he and Mr. Sutton sold their interests to the Messrs. Smith. In the following year he organized the manufacturing concern of Jennings, Beale & Co., Limited, and was elected its Chairman. This corporation has its plant at Leechburgh, and is one of the principal manufacturing firms in that part of Pennsylvania. Mr. Jennings' extended personal experience in the manufacture of steel has enabled him to develop a very high standard in his manufactured products, which consist chiefly in steel plates and sheet steel, and which are of such fine quality and general excellence as to command a wide market. Mr. Jennings is a Republican in politics, but has never identified himself actively in political affairs. He is a member of the Second Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh, of which his mother was a devoted

member for fifty years. He married October 31, 1865, Miss Marion V. Sawyer, daughter of John M. Sawyer, of Washington, Pa., by whom he has two daughters. He has taken an active interest in the Grand Army of the Republic since its organization, and was the first Commander of the first Post organized in Allegheny City, at that time it being the only Post north of the Allegheny River in Western Pennsylvania. He is also a Companion of the Pennsylvania Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion.

---