

COMMEMORATIVE  
BIOGRAPHICAL RECORD  
— OF —  
CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA,

INCLUDING THE COUNTIES OF

Centre, Clinton, Union and Snyder,

CONTAINING

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF PROMINENT AND REPRESENTATIVE  
CITIZENS, AND OF MANY OF THE EARLY SETTLED FAMILIES.

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~ ILLUSTRATED ~

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CHICAGO:  
J. H. BEERS & CO.  
1898.

Returning to Robert Mann (to whom it was left to carry forward and to augment the business established in Pennsylvania by his older brothers), who was only a lad at the time of his parents' removal from New York to Bellefonte, as they came *en route* via Williamsport, Mill Hall and on into Nittany Valley, it did not dawn upon the mind of their youngest son that they were passing the site of his future great achievements, when he was to rescue the declining fortunes of the village of Mill Hall with its iron works collapsing into ruin, and rehabilitate it with a new industry that in less than a half century would make it a busy commercial center, with Robert Mann at the head of one of the leading axe manufacturing industries in the United States; and less than sixty years later finds the gentleman whose business sagacity and foresight developed this great industry retired with ample means to live as his refined tastes desire. He now is passing the evening of life in an elegant home that overlooks the picturesque mountains and valleys and streams of Nittany Valley—a home, too, that overlooks the factory where his sons are managing even to greater success the business of their forefathers.

Robert Mann recalls with great pleasure his childhood days at Bellefonte, where he received his first schooling; these were halcyon days, full of enjoyment—swimming, skating and coasting on those steep hills, and, in company with older boys, hunting squirrels, trapping rabbits, and, not the least interesting, listening to stories such as “Jack, the Giant Killer,” as he sometimes sat on the platform of the old pump that stood in the diamond square. When he was twelve years of age his father finally settled on a small farm near where Unionville, Centre county, has since been built; here Robert took his first lessons as a practical worker in iron. He remembers an occasion when his father was sitting on the vice bench with a neighbor while he (Robert) was forging a piece of iron; and, no doubt stimulated by the spectator, he heard his father say “there is a boy who will make a good workman.” Of course this was very gratifying to him, for he had no higher ambition. During the four years that Robert resided there he attended school three or four months each winter, and in summer worked principally on the land. His father, though then a man of some sixty years, worked with his sons Harris and Robert. He rarely scolded them, and he was indulgent as far as his limited means would permit.

They were allowed plenty of time for hunting and fishing, of which they were very fond. The father's favorite books were “Scott's life of Napoleon Bonaparte,” “Blair's Sermons,” and “Seneca's Morals.” Robert read these books with interest, particularly the former. After dinner during the summer season his father usually lay upon his back, always preferring the hard floor, and read until he fell asleep. Robert's fondness for reading grew with his years, and was only limited by the very few books he had access to. They had a school book called the “National Reader,” which was read and re-read many times over by the brothers, and the pieces they most admired were such as had acquired a wide celebrity in the world, such as “Gray's Elegy,” and writings of Addison, Milton, Pope and Akenside.

William Mann, Jr., twenty-two years older than his brother, Robert, having finally settled near Lewistown, Mifflin county, and established an axe factory there that was destined to become famous, after, say, some five years' successful operation, visited his parents and the family near Unionville, and prevailed on his father to move near his place, he believing that there would be a better opening for Harris and Robert than there in the secluded place where they then resided. In the year 1840 the change was therefore made. William Mann, Sr., and family moved into the stone house at the entrance of the narrows below the axe factory, and here, practically in the employ of his brother, William, Robert Mann spent seven years of his life, principally in the forging department, in the manufacture of tools and axes, but a liberal proportion of this time was devoted to a subordinate care in the management, and also traveling on business over various parts of the State on horseback and in other ways in vogue half a century ago. Finally, Robert Mann, seeing that there was no favorable opening with his brother, William, for bettering his condition, as the latter had sons rapidly growing up, accepted an offer from his brother, Willis, at Mackeyville, Clinton county, to take a position in a new store which he was starting in connection with his axe business. Robert, therefore, bid adieu to Mifflin county, having little or nothing to carry out of it but his experience, which proved to be valuable in the years to come. Robert stayed with his brother, Willis, about two years, principally in the store, during which time he discovered that his brother's affairs were in bad shape, and that his failure was sure to come in the near future. While this condition of his brother's affairs filled him with sorrow and regret, it also inspired him with

a determination to start in business for himself; therefore, early in January, 1849, he made articles of agreement and co-partnership with Mr. Saul McCormick, a merchant of Mill Hall, for the erection of an axe factory on the site of the old forge. Soon after this, Robert Mann was married to Miss Christina Reesman, the former twenty-five and the latter twenty years of age, and April 1st they commenced housekeeping temporarily in Mackeyville. Thus the business and matrimonial enterprises started out simultaneously in the venture of life. And here it may safely be said that there has not been in the county of Clinton a couple who have contributed so much to the industry of the common people, so continuously and for so long a period of time, as the obscure pair who began their wedded life so lowly in Mackeyville.

John Reesman, the father of Mrs. Robert Mann, was born in Dauphin county, Penn., and when a small lad was thrown on his own resources; leaving home, he learned the milling business, which he followed for many years. He purchased land near Mackeyville, Clinton county, which he improved, and there built a mill. His wife, Christina, the mother of all his children, died at Mackeyville, in 1844. Both husband and wife were members of the Evangelical Church, and their house was often opened for prayer and worship. The church that stands on the hill near Mackeyville was erected as a memorial to Mrs. Christina Reesman. Mr. Reesman was a man of strict integrity, was industrious and a good citizen. He was married a second time, and died in 1872, and is buried with his first wife at Mackeyville.

The new firm of Robert Mann & Co. started up about August 1, 1849, with five men. The business increased slowly, but steadily, until the end of the lease for five years. Prior to its expiration, however, a new lease was made for eight years, and arrangements made for greatly enlarging the works, which was carried out. In 1857 Mr. McCormick died; Mr. Mann then purchased the property, and in 1863 the factory was further enlarged, and again in 1876 he further increased its size, until from the small beginning of the capacity of twenty axes per day, it was increased so that in 1877 the output was upward of 400 per day. The works never from the start ceased operation until they were destroyed by fire on September 11, 1877. Plans for the rebuilding of the factory were immediately perfected, and by April, 1878, the new works, with increased capacity, were in operation. In 1880 Mr. Mann built a new factory, complete in its appointments, below Mill Hall, at which exclus-

ively "double-bit" axes have ever since been made. Four years before the absorption of the business by the American Axe & Tool Co., Mr. Mann had given exclusive control to his three sons, Thomas R., at the lower factory, with an output in 1890 of 400 "double-bit" axes per day, employing sixty-five men, and Alfred C. and William H., at the upper factory, with an output of 800 single axes per day, and employing 100 men. At that period the Mann family were the most extensive manufacturers of axes in the world, making at their various factories 2,800 per day, or 840,000 per year, their trade and reputation extending around the globe. The great success of the "Mann Axe" is due to the close attention given to the one business, and to the constant care they have ever exercised in keeping their goods up to the highest point of excellence. In 1890 these factories were absorbed by the American Axe & Tool Co., and the business at this point is now being managed by the sons of Robert Mann. For some years have been manufactured here all of the "double-bit" axes made by the above company, with a capacity of 1,200 "double-bit" axes per day, employing 180 men.

Following are the children of Robert and Christina Mann: Frances M. Garth, whose husband, Abbott B., is a merchant of Mill Hall, and paymaster and shipper of the American Axe & Tool Co., was born at Mill Hall, October 19, 1849; Harris I., born March 8, 1851, died September 15, 1862, of diphtheria; John W., born February 22, 1853, died September 2, 1862, of diphtheria; Thomas R., born February 19, 1855, is cashier of the Colorado & North-western Railway Co., and manager of large smithing works in Boulder, Colo.; Alfred C., born March 7, 1857, is the superintendent of the American Axe & Tool Co., at Mill Hall; Joseph R., born February 16, 1859, is president of the Mann Edge Tool Company, at Lewistown, Penn.; Carrie E., born April 26, 1861, died September 4, 1862, of diphtheria; William H., born August 2, 1863, is a merchant of Mill Hall, Penn.; Mary M., born May 20, 1865, died December 28, 1865; and Robert, Jr., born October 16, 1866, is vice-president and sales agent of the Mann Edge Tool Co., Lewistown, Penn. The mother of these died January 29, 1897, and was buried at Cedar Hill Cemetery. She was a woman of many virtues, an affectionate wife, and a kind and indulgent mother, and her death was keenly felt in the community in which she had so long lived. Mr. Mann, although starting in life very humbly and with little education, has by his untiring industry and business tact not only built up a great indus-

try, become wealthy and made for himself a name and position in the business world, but he has by reading and study become a man of education and culture, and one coming in contact with him would judge him a college-bred gentleman. He is unassuming, genial and social, yet with it all carries dignity. He is a successful man. In politics he is a Republican, well-posted on the history of parties and on the issues of the day. He takes a deep interest in politics although he has never been active in a party sense. With his force and business ability, had he early in life received a more liberal education, he certainly would have forged his way to the front in public affairs, if he had so desired to do. He is a member of the Presbyterian Church.

The following notice of Harvey Mann, for forty years the distinguished head of the axe factory of Boiling Springs, near Bellefonte, is taken from the private narrative of his brother Robert: "My brother Harvey was a man of good mind and scrupulously honorable in his dealings; as long as he devoted his attention strictly to his axe business he was very successful, though greatly hampered by his poor waterpower. He claimed to be the inventor of the process of drawing axe-bits under a trip-hammer, a practice that soon became universal. His greatest invention was the overlaid steel which has come to be extensively used, and which during his lifetime yielded him a handsome royalty; but it was at the sacrifice of his reputation as a manufacturer, for his mind was so engrossed by his invention that his axe business suffered, and at the time of his death was on the decline when it came into the hands of his only surviving son Harvey, a noble young man, whose sudden death a few years after by a railroad accident near Steubenville, Ohio, was the last and the hardest of the heart-crushing bereavements that his now childless and widowed mother had to endure. It was pitiable to see her hopeless sorrow, yet she endured and survived it. Her nephew, J. Fearon Mann, my brother William's third son, leased her axe factory—her greatest business care—and was otherwise much comfort and help to her. She built a small church near her house, and lived for many years in her desolated home with ample means, with which she did much good. She died in the seventy-fourth year of her age, and the family of Harvey Mann became extinct."

[Mill Hall, Penn., September, 1897.]