

1796 * 1883

HISTORY
OF
BUTLER COUNTY,
PENNSYLVANIA.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

OF SOME OF ITS

PROMINENT MEN AND PIONEERS.

CHICAGO:
WATERMAN, WATKINS & Co.
1883.

THE MOHAWK MURDER.

On the last Saturday of June, 1843, in the southern part of Slippery Rock Township, was enacted a deed of brutal slaughter as fiendish and as savage as any embraced in the annals of Indian warfare. An Indian known as Mohawk, who had passed down the road to Butler from the upper lumbering county some days previous, came to the Stone House on the stage on Friday, late in the evening. In Butler he had been drinking and acting suspiciously. On his arrival at the hotel, without a knock or a warning, he passed up stairs into the room where the landlord, Mr. Sill, was sleeping. Sill ordered him out and picked up a club to hasten his departure. The Indian left, and it is supposed that he passed the night among the rocks near the Stone House, as he was seen going up the road early the next morning. He went directly to the house of James Wigton, who was away from home, having gone to the house of his father, a mile distant, to get a horse to use in his farm work. Mrs. Wigton and her five small children were alone in the home. Just what passed there no one was left to tell. Before the return of the husband, Lemuel Davis, who, with his wife and son, had come to help Wigton about his hoeing, entered the house and beheld a scene such as no pen can depict. Mrs. Wigton was lying dead in a pool of blood. Evidently she had not yielded her own life and the lives of her children without a struggle. One of her hands was cut nearly off, as though a knife had been forcibly drawn through it. It is supposed that she tried to defend herself with a butcher knife which was found near by, stained with blood. Her babe in the cradle, was, at first, thought to be unharmed: but when it was taken up, the hor-

rible discovery was made that its brains had been beaten out. Four children up stairs in the sleeping room were found—all dead, and their blood stained the floor, wall and ceiling. A stone which had been used in the fire-place of the wash-house, in place of an iron, was found covered with blood. This had been the instrument of death in the hands of the fiendish savage, and the heads of every victim bore marks of the blows inflicted by it.

Mr. Davis aroused the neighbors, and soon more than a hundred excited people, who had come from the Hickory Furnace and the neighboring farms, were at the scene of the murder. It was soon learned that the Indian had been at Joseph Kennedy's and had thrown a stone at young Joseph. Mohawk was hotly pursued and ran to Philip Kiester's house. There were no men about the place, and the women, who were already informed of the murder, hastened to leave the house. The Indian entered and ran up stairs. The pursuers rushed after him, and one of the number, Mr. Blair, was knocked down by a stone thrown by the savage. It is supposed that Mohawk had gathered up a pocketful of stones on his way to the house. The Kiesters informed the pursuers that there was a loaded pistol in the room where the murderer had taken refuge, and a shot from it was momentarily expected; fortunately the Indian never discovered it. Next an attempt was made to get a dog up stairs, but to no purpose. Then several of the men, carrying a board over their heads, to keep off the missiles of Mohawk, made a rush up the stairway, seized the Indian, overpowered him and tied him with a bedcord. Then they led him to the house where the mangled bodies of his victims lay; he acknowledged his guilt, but said nobody could prove it.

The citizens were mostly in favor of lynching the savage at once. But William Stewart, a man of considerable influence, counseled otherwise and urged obedience to the law. The Indian was taken to Butler, tried in due course, and sentenced to death. He was hung in the spring of 1844.

After the arrest there was great excitement in all the northern part of the county, and even in other counties. People who were familiar with the Indian traits feared that the savage would somehow be able to escape from the jail. Previous to the trial, companies of armed men—one company from New Castle and several from the northern part of the county—gathered at Butler, with the intention of lynching Mohawk. Great excitement resulted. The companies rendezvoused at Jacob Schleppey's tavern, and there they were met by a number of the most prominent men of Butler who argued and expostulated and finally restored peace and order. No whisky or ammunition was sold in Butler during the day. Some

of the more violent advocates of mob-law even threatened to burn the town. Fortunately no evil resulted from the excitement occasioned by this "great popular uprising."

English Evangelical Lutheran Church.—The first meeting in Butler of those favorable to the organization of an English Lutheran Church was held in the German Church of the same denomination, upon January 16, 1843, Jacob Mechling being Secretary, and the Rev. Gobtlieb Bassler, Treasurer. A church constitution was adopted for the guidance of the organization, and at a subsequent meeting the first church council was elected, consisting of Jacob Walter, Sr., and John Negley, Sr., Elders, and John Dull, Jr., and Daniel Kreidler, Deacons. John Negley subsequently resigned, and John McCullough was chosen in his place. The officers were installed February 11, 1843. The Rev. Mr. Bassler served as pastor, and upon June 18, conducted the first sacramental services. About thirty persons had signed the constitution, thus identifying themselves with the new organization, and the number was increased at the first communion service by the reception of fourteen new members. The labors of Rev. Bassler covered a period of about eleven years, from 1843 to 1854, with a brief interregnum. The society spent some time negotiating with the German Lutherans for the joint use of their church, but no arrangement was effected and the question of building was then agitated. A house was erected in 1849-50, upon a lot donated by

Michael Emrick, which for twenty-seven years served the congregation as a place of worship. During the period of the Rev. Bassler's ministry, the ordinance of baptism was administered to fifty children and upward of seventy adults. Among the adult baptisms there was that of an Indian, who had been convicted of a most brutal murder, a mother and several children being the victims. The Indian was none other than Samuel Mohawk, who was confined in jail in Butler awaiting the execution of the capital sentence, and who had been converted by Mr. Bassler. The baptism was solemnized at the prison on February 28, 1844.