

HISTORY
OF
FRANKLIN COUNTY,
PENNSYLVANIA,

CONTAINING A HISTORY OF THE COUNTY, ITS TOWNSHIPS, TOWNS,
VILLAGES, SCHOOLS, CHURCHES, INDUSTRIES, ETC.; PORTRAITS OF
EARLY SETTLERS AND PROMINENT MEN; BIOGRAPHIES;
HISTORY OF PENNSYLVANIA, STATISTICAL AND
MISCELLANEOUS MATTER, ETC., ETC.

ILLUSTRATED.

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WILLIAM ORR. Among those driven from their homes in Scotland by religious intolerance, in the seventeenth century, were the grandparents of a Presbyterian gentleman named John Orr. Like so many of their co-religionists, they sought and found a refuge in the hospitable province of Ulster, in the North of Ireland. With the person named, we are only now concerned because of his son Thomas. Quite early in life Thomas was wafted by the tide of emigration to the shores of America, and settled near Bucklestown, now Darkesville, in the State of Virginia. Not satisfied with the prospects of enlarging his small competency in that locality, and full of the energy and buoyancy of youth, he determined to remove to Pennsylvania, toward which State many thousands of his countrymen were flocking. The modes of traveling in those days, through a comparative wilderness, were very primitive. The traveler either walked or rode on horseback. Thomas chose the latter mode. His arrangements were soon made, and his small stock of goods was packed in his ample saddlebags, and his long journey toward his new home then began. His progress was necessarily slow and wearisome, but he at length arrived in Lancaster County, Penn., where he determined to remain. But this intention was soon changed, and he retraced his steps and journeyed westward until he reached Franklin County. Here he ultimately chose as his home a tract of land in that locality known as "Culbertson's Row," in Southampton Township, Franklin Co., Penn. Settled in his new home, he married Martha, a daughter of Samuel Breckenridge, an old and prominent citizen of the neighborhood. He remained in this vicinity until his death, in 1814, having previously purchased the farm upon which his son William's earlier years were spent. Capt. Thomas Orr, by which title he was usually distinguished, was the father of five children—three sons, John, William and James B., and two daughters, Margaret and Martha. His son William, who was born on April 20, 1802, was twelve years old at the period of his father's death. At this immature age he was sent to Virginia, near Darkesville, to live with a grand-uncle. His residence here was, however, short, as he remained only two years with this relative, and then returned to his maternal home. During a portion of the next six years he attended the neighboring school, and diligently applied himself to his books. A boy of his active intelligence could not help soon acquiring all the rudiments of an education that the district pedagogue was capable of imparting. When he attained his eighteenth year, in 1820, he began an apprenticeship in the tannery of the late James Finley, of Chambersburg. His apprenticeship finished and his trade fully mastered, he started for New Market, Va., at which town he had the promise of work. With his meager effects in a bundle, carried on his shoulder, he traversed, on foot, the long distance intervening between his home and his destination. He did not stay long in New Market. Presuming that Washington presented a more inviting field for a journeyman tanner, he started for the Nation's capital. He walked from New Market to Fredericksburg, and traveled thence by stage to the mouth of Cedar Creek. One of his fellow passengers was no less a personage than Gen. Andrew Jackson, who had not yet acquired the extensive fame and popularity which he afterward secured. His wonderful decision of character and impressive conversation made a deep and permanent impression upon the mind of the young itinerant tanner.

At the mouth of Cedar Creek, William saw a steamboat for the first time, which greatly excited his curiosity, and upon which he took passage for Washington. Disappointed in his expectations of finding lucrative employment in Washington, he then started for home, which, after a wearisome journey, he finally reached. If this episode in his life failed to add anything to his

material wealth, the experience which he so dearly bought, and his knowledge of the world, and especially the development of his own resources, amply repaid him for all he had suffered and lost. In 1830 his actual business life may be said to have begun. In that year, associated with his brother John, he rented the tannery in Orrstown, and moved there, forming a partnership under the firm name of J. & W. Orr. In the following year the firm bought the tannery and the farm connected with it, containing over 100 acres of land, which then embraced the ground upon which Orrstown was subsequently built. But their business operations were by no means confined to the manufacture and sale of leather, but included transactions of various kinds, which the necessities of those who were building a new town demanded; and thus they ranked, in a few years, among the most extensive dealers and merchants in Southern Pennsylvania. In 1836 the firm was enlarged by the admission of James B. Orr, their youngest brother. The name of the firm was then changed to J. Orr & Bros., and the new partnership continued for sixteen years. This business association was a remarkable one. The ties of brotherhood bound the three brothers together like chains of triple steel. The utmost harmony always prevailed among them. No dissensions ever arose; but they were always kind, generous and forbearing, it being the chief desire of each to promote the comfort and contentment of the others. For many years they were thus delightfully associated; and, although James had withdrawn from the partnership some time previously, the business association between the two older brothers was continued until 1870, a period of forty years, when it was only dissolved by the death of John Orr.

The town which bears their name was laid out by John and William Orr, in the year 1833; and grew with remarkable rapidity into one of the prettiest and busiest towns in Franklin County. This success of the new town was almost solely attributable to the liberality with which its projectors dealt with those who purchased lots and erected buildings. A handsome town now fitly commemorates that liberality. It was the wish of the founders that their village should be called "Southampton;" and, in their application for a post-office, that name was given to the locality. For some reason the postoffice department disapproved the name, and then Hon. George Chambers, then in Congress, suggested the name of "Orrstown," which was at once adopted by the Postmaster-general. Orrstown was incorporated as a borough in 1847, and William Orr was chosen its first burgess. About this date the "Orrstown Savings Fund" was established, of which William Orr was one of the founders. This institution continued in successful operation for a period of eleven years. Later he was largely instrumental in organizing a Masonic lodge in the town, known as "Orrstown Lodge," which was the second of its kind organized in the county, and of which institution he was long a trusted officer. He was also one of the originators of the project for the erection of the "Town Hall," which was built in 1869, and of which he was one of the largest stockholders.

In 1839 William Orr was married to Mary A. Gish, daughter of David Gish, who was a prominent farmer and miller of Southampton Township. This event was the beginning of a happy domestic life which embraced almost half a century.

Mr. Orr was always a close student of public affairs, and was thoroughly informed as to the politics of the country, as he had lived contemporaneously with the great political parties of the time, both in their origin and subsequent existence. He was a warm personal friend of James Buchanan, and supported him for the presidency with zealous efficiency. This regard was gratefully

acknowledged and reciprocated by Mr. Buchanan, and during the public life of that eminent statesman the three Orr brothers received many evidences of his confidence and esteem. Mr. Orr, it may be inferred, was always a most pronounced and unwavering advocate and supporter of the Democratic party, and contributed most liberally of his time and means to its success. A native and sturdy independence rendered him naturally averse to holding office of profit. He was unwilling that any one should deem him his debtor for political support. In his own township, it is true, he accepted offices of trust, and most faithfully and acceptably filled them. But then the township, not Mr. Orr, was the recipient of a political favor. As long as his health permitted he attended and worked at the polls assiduously and ardently, his sole object being the success of the representatives of the principles he deemed most worthy of triumph.

Physically, Mr. Orr was tall, well-formed, with an elastic step and graceful presence. His manner was cordial and winning, and those who met him, even casually, did not fail to esteem him ever afterward. In his later years his quiet dignity, and gentle deportment and kindly interest excited in all who knew him a strong sentiment of affectionate regard. He was a wise counselor and considerate friend, and those who desired his aid in the multifarious troubles of life were never disappointed in consulting him. He was among the most generous of men, and consequently his impulsive benevolence was often bestowed upon unworthy recipients. This never disturbed his equanimity, because he always preferred to help an intriguing knave rather than to run the risk of repelling a proper and worthy applicant for his sympathy and aid. He was a close observer of men and an acute judge of human nature; although he was quick to detect its weaknesses, foibles and deceptions, he was singularly free from censoriousness, and never commented unjustly or even harshly upon the misbehavior of those whose conduct he could only disapprove. This wonderful liberality was almost unexampled. His disposition was calm and most equable. He fully understood the true philosophy of life, and put the best construction on the motives of his fellows that the circumstances would admit, and never grieved over events which he could not remedy or avert. His presence seemed to infuse good feeling and comfort to all around him, and warmed into sympathetic fellowship all who came within its gentle and calming influence. He was subject to no variable moods, and his friends knew to-day exactly how they would find him to-morrow. He was a most interesting conversationalist, and his large stock of ideas, derived from reading and a wide experience in the affairs of the world, made him a most delightful companion. He had a fine sense of humor, and his wit was most keen, but gentle. He always looked at the best side of human nature, and when he commented at all upon the conduct of rascals, it was always done without bitterness, and with good-natured and pleasant sarcasm. He preferred to laugh at the trickery and peccadilloes of his fellows rather than punish them. Yet the bold and reckless violator of the law found in him a stern and determined foe. Heaven most highly favors any community in which it places for half a century such a man as William Orr. His influence and example are beyond all human estimation.

It is needless to say that Mr. Orr was a most affectionate husband and father. His greatest and most constant desire seemed always to be to promote the comfort and welfare of his devoted family. He was fond of books and an admirer of the earlier classic poetry. Of poetic writers Burns was his favorite, and he had committed to memory the greater part of the poems of that erratic genius, with apt quotations from which he was accustomed to point his con-

versation. Only a fortnight before his death, while one of his daughters was reading one of these poems to him, a slight error which she chanced to make was quickly detected and corrected. Through his long life Mr. Orr adhered to Presbyterianism, the faith of his fathers, and was a constant worshiper in the church of his denomination until the infirmities of advancing years deprived him of that privilege. His life was singularly pure and blameless, and in it were fully exemplified all the Christian virtues and graces. As old age stole over him with all its physical weaknesses, his mental and moral nature seemed correspondingly to expand and soften, until he seemed almost the venerable impersonation of charity and love. For several years before his death Mr. Orr had withdrawn from business and spent his whole time with his family and friends. He felt that the end of his long life was approaching, and he calmly awaited its end. On Monday morning, January 31, 1881, he passed away quietly and peacefully, leaving his family and friends, in his spotless character, a legacy beyond all price.