

HISTORY
OF
VENANGO COUNTY,
PENNSYLVANIA.

ITS PAST AND PRESENT,

INCLUDING

ITS ABORIGINAL HISTORY; THE FRENCH AND BRITISH OCCUPATION OF THE
COUNTRY; ITS EARLY SETTLEMENT AND SUBSEQUENT GROWTH; A
DESCRIPTION OF ITS HISTORIC AND INTERESTING LOCALITIES; ITS
RICH OIL DEPOSITS AND THEIR DEVELOPMENT; SKETCHES OF
ITS CITIES, BOROUGHS, TOWNSHIPS, AND VILLAGES; NEIGH-
BORHOOD AND FAMILY HISTORY; PORTRAITS AND
BIOGRAPHIES OF PIONEERS AND REPRESENT-
ATIVE CITIZENS; STATISTICS, ETC., ETC.

ILLUSTRATED.

CHICAGO, ILL.:
BROWN, RUNK & CO., PUBLISHERS.
1890.

ARNOLD PLUMER is a conspicuous figure in the history of Venango county. He came of that stock of people who settled New England, and who have stamped their personality indelibly upon American civilization, being the sixth in descent from Francis Plumer who with eleven other emigrants from England founded the town of Newbury, Massachusetts, in 1635. The branch of the family to which he belonged removed to what is now Allegheny county, Pennsylvania, soon after the British standard was planted upon the ruins of Fort Duquesne; and thence his father, Samuel Plumer, who had married Patty Adams, of the distinguished New England family of that name, removed to the farm in Jackson township, Venango county, now owned by John Fetterman. There the subject of this sketch was born on the 6th of June, 1801. His occupations and opportunities for improvement outside the home circle, were, during his boyhood, such as were the common lot of the sons of the pioneers of western Pennsylvania. Undoubtedly the best instruction which he received, or the country afforded, was given by his mother, who had brought into her frontier home the culture of the New England of her day. Aside from this, little other training preparatory to the struggle of life was within his reach, if we except that discipline, which, coming from the poverty and privations of a new country, teaches and enforces self-denial and self-reliance.

Early in life Mr. Plumer took an active interest in politics, and soon became a recognized leader in the Democratic party. Four months after he had completed his twenty-second year he was elected sheriff of Venango county. On the 25th of January, 1830, Governor Wolf appointed him prothonotary and clerk of the several courts, recorder of deeds, and register of wills, which offices he held during six years. In 1836 he was elected a member of the twenty-fifth congress in the district composed of the counties of Crawford, Erie, Warren, and Venango. On the 20th of May, 1839, he was appointed by President Van Buren United States marshal for the western district of Pennsylvania, in which office he served until the 6th day of May, 1841. While holding this office, viz., in October, 1840, he was elected a member of the twenty-seventh congress in the same district which he represented in the twenty-fifth congress. On the 14th of December, 1847, he was again appointed United States marshal for the western district of Pennsylvania, and served until April 3, 1848, when he resigned to accept the office of state treasurer to which he had been elected by the legislature of that year.

At the close of his term of office as state treasurer, Mr. Plumer practically retired from public life, and engaged more actively in private pursuits than his official duties had before permitted. He, however, continued to take as lively an interest in politics as he had taken while holding office. It was about this period that Mr. Buchanan's candidacy for the presidency took definite shape. He and Mr. Plumer were friends of more than ordinary mutual regard. Mr. Plumer had the highest admiration of Mr. Bu-

chanan's abilities and character, and was, as the sequel abundantly proved, unselfishly devoted to his advancement. Mr. Buchanan cordially reciprocated these sentiments. He confided in Mr. Plumer as he confided in few others, and, especially during his absence from the country, relied upon his judgment very largely in whatever affected his political prospects. To use the language of one who had an intimate knowledge of the subject about which he wrote: "When Mr. Buchanan went to England as minister in 1853, at a meeting of his friends in this city (Philadelphia) to 'send him off,' he gave in writing that in matters of importance in reference to nomination in 1856 Mr. Plumer was to decide if dissensions arose among the workers."

During Mr. Buchanan's residence in England Mr. Plumer was called upon to attest the sincerity of his friendship for him by an act of self-sacrifice. The Know-nothing wave which swept over the country in 1854 left party supremacy in Pennsylvania trembling in the balance. Until that time it was a political maxim that "As Pennsylvania goes, so goes the Union." And the taking of a presidential candidate from a state that could not be relied upon, to cast its electoral vote for him was a thing not to be thought of. It was therefore doubly important to Mr. Buchanan that Democratic supremacy should be re-established in Pennsylvania beyond a doubt, before the national convention should be held in 1856. These considerations gave to the state election in 1855 an importance second only to that of a presidential election, although but a single officer, a canal commissioner, was to be elected. The interests of the Democratic party in the state and nation, and the purely personal interests of Mr. Buchanan alike demanded that the strongest candidate that could be named should be put forward. He must be a pronounced friend of Mr. Buchanan, and he must not only be a man of such personal popularity as to unite his own party, but he must be of such exalted character and spotless life as to challenge the respect of his political adversaries. There were many Democrats in the state of considerable eminence whose friendship for Mr. Buchanan was as pronounced and sincere as was that of Mr. Plumer; there were others of greater personal popularity of that sort which comes from the possession of those so-called magnetic qualities which inspire the rank and file of a party with enthusiasm, and yet others whose character compared not unfavorably with his, but among them all there was no one who so well filled all the requirements of the occasion as he did. It was therefore decreed in the council of Mr. Buchanan's friends that he must accept the nomination for canal commissioner. To accept such nomination from a party whose ranks had been shattered the year before by an assault which had resulted in seating the candidate of the combined Whigs and Know-nothings in the gubernatorial chair was no small sacrifice on Mr. Plumer's part. The office was not one of considerable dignity; its duties were laborious and exacting, such as could not be performed by a deputy, and its emoluments were trifling.

Its possession could not add to the fame or prestige of one who had occupied higher stations, and Mr. Plumer had no need of its emoluments if they had been much greater than they were, but had need in his private business of the time which would be required for the discharge of its duties. Party exigencies and the interest of Mr. Buchanan, however, required that he should make the sacrifice. He accepted the nomination, made the canvass, and was elected. Pennsylvania being restored to the Democrats Mr. Buchanan's nomination and election the following year were assured.

After Mr. Buchanan's election there was a general expectation and desire on the part of Mr. Plumer's friends throughout the state that he should be honored with a seat in the cabinet. The intimate and cordial relations which had so long existed between him and Mr. Buchanan; the confidence reposed in him by the latter; his prominence in the councils of the party; his party services, and, above all, his high character and his fitness for the place which was assigned to him by the consensus of his friends, that of postmaster-general, all pointed to him as one worthy of this farther honor and likely to be equally acceptable to the president-elect, and to the people. A large number of Democratic newspapers, recognizing these considerations, and reflecting public sentiment in their respective localities, recommended his appointment; and many leading Democrats who believed that Pennsylvania should be represented in the cabinet, united without his knowledge or consent in asking that the portfolio of the postoffice department be tendered to him. To the delegation that presented this request, Mr. Buchanan replied: "If I am to have a member of my cabinet from Pennsylvania there is no one more worthy than Mr. Plumer." And the same morning that Mr. Buchanan left Wheatland for Washington a newspaper published at his home, and supposed to speak by his authority, announced that Mr. Plumer had been selected as the head of the postoffice department. At this time Mr. Plumer was in Washington, and there learning the unauthorized use that had been made of his name, called upon the president immediately after his arrival in the city, and after referring to what he had learned, peremptorily declined to be considered in connection with a cabinet appointment. The condition of his health, which at that time was so far impaired as to forbid his undertaking any continuous and exacting labors, was understood to be the controlling reason of his unwillingness to take office under Mr. Buchanan.

Had the environment of Mr. Plumer's youth been such as that of his later years it is improbable that he would ever have held office or occupied so conspicuous a place as he did in the politics of the county and commonwealth. As in ancient and in medieval times, when wars for plunder and for conquest and for the advancement of religion discouraged everything like industrial progress, the army and the church presented almost the only avenue of dis-

tion; so, in the earlier period of our national life, when the establishment of republican institutions was the paramount thought, and later, in the poorer and more sparsely settled portions of the country, where the sterility of the soil and the difficulties of intercommunication have been unfriendly to private enterprise, the chief attractions for men of the higher order of intellect were found in the business of government and the business of politics. But as population and wealth increase, the competitions of the whole range of industrial activities and of the learned professions for talent of the highest order become so great that few men of character and ability are willing to turn aside from them for the honors and emoluments of official life. And just in proportion as private pursuits become more attractive by reason of their fruits, and the prestige which success therein gives, so does the *morale* of politics suffer, not by comparison merely, but absolutely; and it comes to pass that methods are employed for producing results from which self-respecting men instinctively recoil. When Mr. Plumer entered politics public discussion was the potent agency employed in political contests. The stirring eloquence of Clay, the keener dialectics of Calhoun, and the all but resistless logic of Webster, swayed multitudes and at the same time inspired in the minds of the people a sense of the high character of public trusts, and led them to seek men worthy to execute such trusts rather than suffer the unworthy to obtrude themselves as candidates for public favor. It was a noble ambition that led men to take part in the contests in which the giants named and others of only less stature were leaders; and Mr. Plumer was naturally attracted to the arena in which they shone so resplendently. But, with the passing away of the generation of statesmen who were in the full maturity of their great powers when he came upon the stage, there gradually came those changed circumstances which, as already pointed out, naturally result in flooding the domain of politics with a class of self-seekers whose methods are born of their necessities—necessities springing from their want of those qualifications which alone should recommend to public favor. Mr. Plumer was too modest to propose himself for office, too self-respecting to solicit votes, and utterly incapable of employing those other methods by which personal solicitation has been supplemented since the modern *regime* has been in vogue. Moreover he had an aptitude for private affairs which, if it had been cultivated in early life, would have secured for him, under favorable circumstances, a position in financial and industrial circles more enviable than can ordinarily be attained in the public service. Hence it was that after twenty-six years of nearly continuous public service he drifted into private pursuits of varied character, such as commercial, manufacturing, mining, and banking enterprises, in all of which he was so uniformly successful during a period of twenty years that he left the largest estate which up to the time of his death had been accumulated by one man in Venango county.

In person Mr. Plumer was tall and of a majestic presence in keeping with the simple dignity of his character and deportment. The humblest people approached him easily and confidently, neither high nor low, otherwise than respectfully. Although he modestly protested that he was not a public speaker, he was in much demand as such, and whenever he spoke, though he practiced none of the arts of oratory as commonly understood, he was sure of an attentive audience, and always spoke impressively and forcibly; he *talked* earnestly and directly to the point. A communicant in the Methodist Episcopal church, he exemplified his profession by his life and conversation, which were so pure that the one might have been reflected from a mirror and the other repeated in any presence without causing a blush.

He was married on the 6th of February, 1827, to Margaret, daughter of the late George McClelland of Franklin, who bore him six children, viz: Elvira A., now the widow of the late Judge Gilmore of Uniontown, Pennsylvania; Samuel; Margaret, wife of H. W. Lamberton of Winona, Minnesota; Arnold A.; Ann Eliza, wife of Reverend R. H. Austin of Philadelphia, and Henry B. He died on the 28th of April, 1869, leaving a family circle unbroken except by his own death. Upon the records of the courts of Venango county, which were then in session, is contained the following minute under date of Wednesday April 28, 1869: "At four o'clock, P. M., the courts on motion adjourned in respect to the memory of Hon. A. Plumer this day deceased." The next evening the citizens of Franklin assembled in the court room to do farther honor to his memory, at which meeting the late Judge Trunkey presided, assisted by the late Judge Irwin and Thomas Hoge, and a minute was adopted expressive of the estimation in which Mr. Plumer was held by his neighbors, and their sense of the loss which the community had sustained in his death.—C. H.