

LIVES
OF THE
GOVERNORS
OF
PENNSYLVANIA,

WITH THE
INCIDENTAL HISTORY OF THE STATE,

FROM
1609 TO 1873.

BY
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New Edition, Revised and Enlarged.



PHILADELPHIA:
JAMES K. SIMON,
No. 29 SOUTH SIXTH STREET.
1873.

SIMON SNYDER,

GOVERNOR UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF 1790,

December 20, 1808, to December 16, 1817.

AT an early day German emigrants to America very generally settled in Pennsylvania. Of all the Colonies this had the greatest proportion of German population. Simon Snyder was the first Governor selected from the descendants of that nationality. He was, too, the first who was taken from the ranks of the laboring class, having risen by toil from the most humble beginning, and known by experience the hard lot of the lowly.

He was born at Lancaster, on the 5th of November, 1759. His father, Anthony Snyder, was a respectable mechanic, who came to America from the Palatinate, in 1758. His mother, whose maiden name was Knippenberg, was born near Oppenheim, Germany. Of five children, the offspring of this marriage, Simon was the fourth. The father died in 1774, and two years after, the son, then at the age of seventeen, removed from Lancaster to the town of York, in the adjoining county, where he remained for eight years. Here he learned the business of a tanner and currier, serving faithfully an apprenticeship of four years, without being bound by any indenture or written agreement, evincing thus early a steadfastness of character, and a faith that was auspicious. At a night school, kept by John Jones, a worthy member of the Society of Friends, he was taught reading, writing, and arithmetic, and made some progress in higher mathematics. His industry at this period was very great, and often at the midnight hour, after a hard day's work, he was still at his books, and his Sundays were usually devoted to study.

In July, 1784, he removed to Selinsgrove, then Northumberland County, since Union, now Snyder, the two latter having been successively erected out of territory of the former, and the last having been named in honor of that then nameless young man. Here he opened a store, and became the owner of a mill. By his good sense and excellent business habits, he soon acquired influence with his fellow-men, and was often consulted in questions of difficulty. He had acquired a knowledge of the simpler legal forms, and was frequently employed as a scrivener. Quiet and unassuming in deportment, he was still ever ready to interest himself in behalf of the poor and those in distress. Recognizing his admirable fitness for the position, he was finally elected unanimously by the freeholders of a large district, a Justice of the Peace, and for twelve years continued to officiate with great acceptability. So universally were his decisions respected that no appeal was ever made from any judgment of his to the Court of Common Pleas, and but a single writ of *certiorari* was sued out in all that time, though the inhabitants were of that restless class which are always in the lead in the tide of civilization. In the numerous actions brought before him for petty criminal offences, his efforts to reconcile the contending parties so generally prevailed, that he made return to the court of but two recognizances.

In 1789, Mr. Snyder was elected a member of the convention which framed the State Constitution of the following year, and though but a novice in politics, and little skilled in the management of deliberative bodies, yet his votes and his personal influence were uniformly given in the interest of enlightened statesmanship, and he showed himself, as we might anticipate, a conscientious and painstaking representative of the popular will.

In 1797, he was elected a member of the House of Representatives, of which body, in 1802, he was chosen Speaker. The duties of this office, he was enabled, by his ready memory and strong native sense, to discharge with great acceptability. While he was in the chair, was passed the Act commonly

known as the Hundred Dollar Act, which originated with him, and of which he was a warm advocate. It embodied the arbitration principle, and provided for the trial of causes where the amount in question was less than one hundred dollars, before a justice of the peace. McKean, who was then Governor, opposed this measure, and though the party in the Legislature which passed it was the party which had elevated him to power, the controversy over it was spirited and bitter, producing an estrangement, which, being aggravated by other differences, finally resulted in the complete severance of party ties, the Governor identifying himself with the Federalists, and the Jefferson Democrats, or Republicans as they were then called, repudiating him entirely.

Snyder continued to preside over the House until 1805, when, by his energy and sturdy qualities exhibited in championing the Hundred Dollar Act, and other measures, being recognized as a fit leader on a broader theatre, he was nominated for Governor in opposition to McKean. The latter was elected by barely five thousand majority, but the excellent run made by Snyder demonstrated unmistakably that he was strong with the people. He continued to be elected to the House and to be annually selected as its Speaker until 1808, when he was again nominated for Governor, the opposite party being led by James Ross, of Pittsburg, a man of the greatest respectability and eminence. The result was the election of Snyder by a majority of over twenty-four thousand votes. He was re-elected in 1811, and again in 1814, by overwhelming majorities, serving the full constitutional period of nine years.

Early in his administration, Governor Snyder found himself in conflict with the national authority, in a controversy which grew out of a Revolutionary claim; and had a less prudent and judicious man been in the gubernatorial chair, it might have resulted in the most serious consequences. Four American seamen had been taken on board the British ship *Active*, on its way from Jamaica to New York, in the year 1778, who, when off the coast of Delaware, overpowered

the officers and the rest of the crew, and were taking their prize in, when it was seized by Captain Houston, of the American ship *Convention*, who took it to port, and libelled it for himself, seamen, and State of Pennsylvania. Gideon Umstead, one of the four seamen, resisted this action on the part of himself and fellows. The case went to a jury, where it was decided that Umstead and his associates should have one-fourth of the prize money, and the other party the remainder. To this Umstead would doubtless have acceded; but at this juncture Benedict Arnold, then in command in Philadelphia, bought the claim of the four seamen, and had application made to Congress for revisal of the judgment of the Pennsylvania Court of Admiralty. This was effected, and the entire prize money was awarded to the four seamen. For his connection with this case, Arnold was first suspected of a treacherous character. The three-fourths of the prize money, according to the decision of the Pennsylvania Court, was guaranteed to the original claimants; and this the Governor felt himself bound to execute. But before any collision occurred, he transmitted the record of the proceedings of the Legislature in the case to President Madison, who made the following reply, dated April 13th, 1809: "SIR, — I have received your letter of the 6th instant, accompanied by certain Acts of the Legislature of Pennsylvania, which will be laid before Congress according to the desire expressed. Considering our respective relations to the subject of these communications, it would be unnecessary, if not improper, to enter into any of the questions connected with it. It is sufficient in the actual posture of the case to remark, that the Executive of the United States is not only unauthorized to prevent the execution of a decree sanctioned by the Supreme Court of the United States, but is expressly enjoined by statute to carry into effect any such decree when opposition may be made to it. It is a propitious circumstance, therefore, that whilst no legal discretion lies with the Executive of the United States to decline steps which might lead to a very painful issue, a provision has

been made by the legislative act transmitted by you, adequate to the removal of the existing difficulty; and I feel great pleasure in assuring myself that the authority which it gives will be exercised in a spirit corresponding with the patriotic character of the State over which you preside. Be pleased, sir, to accept assurances of my respectful consideration."

The issue of the case is thus briefly and clearly stated by the Governor in his annual message to the Legislature of 1810: "On the 27th of February last, the Executive communicated to the Legislature that, in consequence of proceedings had in the Supreme Court of the United States, an attachment would be issued against the executrices of the late Mr. Rittenhouse, formerly Treasurer of this State, to compel them to pay to Gideon Umstead and others, the money which they had paid into the State Treasury, in obedience to an Act passed the 2d day of April, 1803, which Act, in the name of this Commonwealth, guaranteed an indemnification to the said executrices from any process whatever issued out of any Federal Court, in consequence of their obedience to the provisions of that Act. In that message the Executive informed the Legislature that he was making arrangements to call out a portion of the militia, that being the only means in his power to carry into effect the Act of 2d of April, 1803. Orders were accordingly transmitted to the Adjutant-General, inclosing the appointment of General Michael Bright, and his orders, which were laid before the Legislature, March 2d, 1809. On the 24th day of March, the General stationed a guard at the houses of the executrices. On the 25th day of March, the Marshal of the district was resisted by the militia, and prevented from entering the houses of the executrices. That officer afterwards issued notices calling out a *posse comitatus*, to assist him in executing this attachment. Previous to the day on which the *posse* was ordered out, to wit, on the 15th of April, the Marshal eluded the vigilance of the guard and arrested one of the executrices. A *habeas corpus* before the Chief-Justice was taken out in her name by the Attorney-General. The Chief-Justice refusing to liberate the

body of the executrix, and ordering her to remain in custody of the Marshal, the Executive directed the guard to be withdrawn and the money to be paid."

The period during which Snyder was Governor was an important and exciting one in the national life. Napoleon was on the throne of France. On the thrones of Spain, Holland, and Italy he had, by his sword, seated his three brothers. All Europe, amazed at his giant strides, took up arms against him. The United States, preserving a perfectly neutral attitude, was allowed by her commercial marine to visit freely the ports of the belligerents, and was greatly prospered. In violation of the neutral rights of the United States, Great Britain, in 1806, issued an order in council declaring the whole coast of the continent from the Elbe to Brest in a state of blockade. Napoleon retaliated by issuing his decree at Berlin declaring the entire coast of the British Islands also in blockade. As a consequence, American vessels were seized by both French and English cruisers, and her commerce, though preserving a strict neutrality, was suddenly swept from the ocean. The baneful effect of the "orders" and "decrees" was aggravated by the haughty assumption of the right, by Great Britain, to search unceremoniously American vessels for suspected deserters from the British navy, under cover of which the grossest outrages were committed, American seamen being dragged from the decks of their vessels and impressed into the royal service. In retaliation, President Jefferson, in July, 1807, issued a proclamation ordering all British armed vessels to leave the waters of the United States, and forbidding any to enter until satisfaction for the past, and security for the future, should be assured; and upon the meeting of Congress in December, an embargo was laid, detaining all vessels, American and foreign, then in the ports of the United States, and ordering all American vessels home that were abroad, that the seamen might be trained for hostilities. Negotiations were conducted with varying success, but without any pacifying results. In the meantime the causes of irritation increased, until finally the state of feeling

became so much embittered, that in 1811 President Madison, by authority of Congress, declared war against Great Britain. The war, which lasted for a period of nearly four years, is known as the WAR OF 1812, and resulted in the establishment of a really national character to the United States. Dr. Franklin once heard a person in conversation speak of the Revolution as *the War of Independence* and reproved him, saying: "Sir, you mean the Revolution; the war of *independence* is yet to come. It was a war *for* independence, but not *of* independence."

One of the first manœuvres of the British in the contest was to incite the Indians to hostilities, and succeeded but too well. On the night of the 6th of November, a bloody battle was fought near the confluence of the Tippecanoe and Wabash rivers, with a powerful body of the savages led by Tecumseh, a chief who rivalled Pontiac in bravery, in which General Harrison gained a complete victory, though at great sacrifice. The operations along the Canada frontier against the British army were less fortunate. On the 16th of August, 1812, General Hull, Governor of Michigan, after having crossed into Canada and attempted to reduce the opposing force, and been obliged to return, was himself compelled to surrender the post at Detroit, where he had taken shelter, whereby fort, stores, garrison, and territory passed into the enemy's hands. Two months later, General Van Rensselaer was defeated with considerable loss at Queenstown Heights, though the British commander-in-chief, Brock, was killed in the action. At Frenchtown, on the River Raisin, twenty-five miles south of Detroit, at dawn on the morning of the 22d of January, 1813, General Winchester, after a brave resistance, was forced to surrender to the British and Indians, and though the sick and wounded were by the terms of the surrender solemnly guaranteed safety, they were inhumanly murdered. The brave and successful defence of Fort Stephenson by the youthful Major Croghan, with only one hundred and fifty soldiers, when attacked by five hundred regulars and eight hundred Indians, formed some relief to the

otherwise dark picture. The enemy was repulsed with a loss of one hundred and fifty killed and wounded, while the defenders lost but one killed and seven wounded. Croghan was but twenty-two years old. The tide of victory now began to turn in favor of the Americans. On the 5th of October, General Harrison came up with the British and Indians at the Moravian village on the Thames, and defeated them with great slaughter, the famous Tecumseh being among the killed. By this victory all that Hull had lost was regained, the power of the Indians was broken, and the English were driven from Michigan.

Meanwhile, upon the ocean and upon the lakes engagements occurred which rank with the best exhibitions of naval valor that the world has seen — Commodores Decatur, Hull, Jones, Perry, Lawrence, Porter, and McDonough combating the enemy with a valor which has made that flag under which they fought respected on every water, even to the remotest seas.

The campaign of 1814 was conducted by the enemy with vigor. Early in that year the power of Napoleon was broken, and fourteen thousand of Wellington's veterans were sent to Canada. The battles of Oswego, Chippewa, Lundy's Lane, Fort Erie, and Plattsburg, which followed, were nevertheless favorable to the American arms — Generals Scott, Ripley, and Brown winning substantial victories, and successfully turning back the enemy from his march of invasion. In August, Ross, one of the most trusted of Wellington's generals, with six thousand men, in a flotilla of sixty vessels, arrived in the Chesapeake, for the conquest of the capital. He found little to oppose him. A feeble fleet under Commodore Barney was abandoned and burned. A small force of militia under General Winder met Ross at Bladensburg and made a sharp resistance; but the affair was soon decided in favor of the latter. On the same day, August 24th, Ross captured Washington, burned the Capitol, President's house, and other public and private buildings, and hastily withdrew to the fleet. A few days later he appeared before Baltimore.

and, debarking, advanced to the attack. He was met by a division of the force brought together for the defence, commanded by General Smith, a revolutionary veteran, and in a brief skirmish which ensued, Ross was killed. A fierce engagement followed, in which the enemy lost severely. In the meantime the fleet approached, and opened fire upon Fort McHenry, which was continued almost incessantly for a day and a night, throwing not less than fifteen hundred bombshells. The inhabitants were in great consternation; but before light on the morning of the 14th of September, despairing of success, the enemy secretly embarked and moved away.

The song of the *Star-Spangled Banner* was inspired by the terrors of this bombardment. A gentleman had left Baltimore in a flag-of-truce boat to secure the release of a friend, who had been captured, and was a prisoner on board the fleet. He was not permitted to return, lest he should disclose the intention to bombard the city. The flag-boat was kept under the guns of a frigate, and he was compelled to witness this terrific fire, which the British admiral boasted would soon reduce the city. Through the whole day he watched the flag at the fort with indescribable anxiety. At night he followed with eager eye the bursting shells, and in the early dawn of the morning, to his great joy, he distinguished that banner still floating. Under these circumstances the national song was written.

Finally, General Jackson, who had been engaged in punishing the Indians in the south, finding that the enemy in great numbers were making their appearance in the Gulf of Mexico, promptly responded to a call from New Orleans for help, and marching thither made preparations for defence. In hastily constructed breastworks upon the river, four miles below the city, on the morning of the 8th of January, 1815, Jackson, with six thousand militia, met General Packenham, with twelve thousand men, many of them Wellington's veterans, and after a brief but sharp engagement, gained a complete victory. General Packenham fell, and his army

withdrew, leaving seven hundred dead, and more than a thousand wounded upon the field. The Americans lost but seven killed and six wounded. Two weeks before this, a treaty of peace had been concluded between the two nations at Ghent, Belgium; but the news of it had not reached America when the battle of New Orleans was fought.

In all this contest the Government of Pennsylvania was administered faithfully in the interest of the national authority. Governor Snyder believed the war to be justly undertaken, and his supporters were emphatically of the war party. All his energies were devoted to bringing out the forces of the State required for prosecuting the war with vigor. Volunteers received but eight dollars a month from the General Government. Every inducement in addition to this, which he could consistently use, to facilitate volunteering and to aid in equipment and support of the troops, he was vigilant and studious in extending. It is related that Mrs. Snyder even cut up her crimson cloak to make trimmings for the soldiers' uniforms. The closing paragraph of his first inaugural address to the Legislature proves the warmth of feeling with which he regarded the support of the nation in the hour of its tribulation. "In a national crisis like the present," he says, "where all that is dear and precious to the United States is threatened by the violence and aggressions of foreign powers, it is peculiarly and eminently the duty of all the constituted authorities to act in support of the just and honorable measures adopted by the Federal Government, as if animated by one heart, one spirit, and one determination. The happy influence of such an accordance of opinion and action is not bounded by our country, but beneficially extends itself wherever American politics can interest, or American interests be affected."

To the time of the accession of Governor Snyder, the Executives had been in the habit of delivering their annual messages to the Legislature in person. He abolished that custom and inaugurated that of communicating them in writing, which has since continued to prevail. The reason

for this change he thus states in the opening of his first message: "I have been induced to depart from this custom from a conviction that communications by message are more in accordance with our republican principles and institutions, simplicity of manners, sound economy, and equally respectful to the members composing the Legislature."

The interests of the nation were equally dear to the heart of Governor Snyder with those of the Commonwealth over which he presided, and in his annual messages he alluded to them with as much devotion as though they were the objects of his immediate care. In his message of the 5th of December, 1811, he thus utters his convictions upon the subject of slavery, the first of the governors to enter his protest against it: "Elevated as is her character for humanity, there is yet permitted to remain one other stain on the otherwise fair and benign features of her polity. The galling yoke of slavery is still felt by some of our fellow-creatures, in different parts of this commonwealth, and its pressure is made the more severe, by witnessing the happiness and freedom of surrounding multitudes. A recent act of cruelty which came under my notice, and which awakened feelings of a painful and distressing nature, will, I trust, excuse the introduction to your notice of a subject so interesting to the whole human family, and embracing facts and practices palpably inconsistent with the terms and spirit of that fundamental and immutable law of reason, 'That all men are born free and equal.'" The allusion above to the act of cruelty shows that the Governor's heart was open to generous emotions, and that it was touched with pity by every pang, the result of wrong and injustice, inflicted upon even the lowliest of the human species.

The following incident, given by John Binns, a friend of the Governor, who was present when the facts related transpired, also illustrates the goodness of the Governor's heart, and his readiness to vindicate the rights of the weak when unjustly assailed. "Soon after the inauguration of Governor Snyder," says Mr. Binns, "in 1808, I was sitting with him

in a room at his lodgings at Bausman's tavern in Lancaster. The room was upon the second floor, and it was evening. A waiter entered and said, 'There are some gentlemen below who desire to speak with the Governor.' 'Tell them to walk up,' said the Governor. In a few minutes seven well-dressed persons entered. The foremost of them said, 'We wish to speak with the Governor on a matter of business.' The Governor answered, 'I have no objection that my friend Mr. Binns should hear anything you may wish to say to me, or anything I may have to say in answer.' The speaker for the party then said, 'We are all applicants for the public offices in Chester County. We have waited upon your Excellency to say that we shall be quite satisfied, and shall zealously support your administration, whoever you may appoint, with the exception of Charles Kenny. He is an Irishman. We know that his appointment would be very unpopular.' The Governor bowed and made answer, 'I shall consider, gentlemen, what you have said.' The gentlemen applicants bowed respectfully and retired. The Governor turned promptly towards me, and said, 'That's a selfish combination against an absent individual. I shall appoint Kenny.' He did appoint him Clerk of the Orphans' Court of Chester County, and he was as good an officer and as popular an appointment as any that he made."

Governor Snyder was not the man to be intimidated by threats, or driven from any policy which he thought to be right, in the hope of thereby gaining a temporary popularity. Few men have been bolder, or more independent in their public acts, or have been less swayed by considerations of selfish expediency than he. In the session of the Legislature of 1813-1814, a bill was passed by a large majority chartering forty banks. It was upon the eve of making the nomination for governor for the succeeding term. At that time the nominations were made by the members of the Legislature. After assembling in caucus, it was remarked that the Act chartering the banks was still in the hands of the Governor, and that a nomination should not be made until it was seen whether he

approved the bill. But no considerations like this could sway Governor Snyder, and promptly within three days from the time of its passage, he returned the bill with a statement of his objections. It did not pass at that session. The Governor's independence was the theme of universal encomium; and he was re-elected by a majority of over twenty thousand votes.

During the administration of Governor Snyder a notorious woman, Ann Smith, *alias* Carson, formed a bold scheme for abducting the Governor's youngest son, then a lad at school, and for holding him until the pardon of her paramour, who was under sentence of death, should be secured. For this purpose she started from Philadelphia with two hired ruffians, armed to the teeth, and was making her way to Selinsgrove, on the Susquehanna, where the Governor's family resided. The Governor was secretly informed of their coming, and was prepared to receive them. They were allowed to pass Harrisburg undisturbed; but at Hunter's Falls, ten miles above, where they stopped for the night, and where they were drawn into conversation disclosing their purposes and exhibiting their arms, they were all apprehended, and after a trial and conviction were given a home in the penitentiary.

Upon retiring from the office of Governor, in 1817, he returned to his residence near Selinsgrove, and at the next general election was chosen to the State Senate, but only served during one session. He died of typhoid fever, on the 9th of November, 1819. The last half year of his life was rendered unhappy by domestic afflictions, and the weight of grievous cares. His long residence at the seat of government had prevented him from giving that attention to the management of his extensive estates which they required, and he in consequence found himself much embarrassed. The death of his son Frederick, which occurred at this time of business anxiety, broke his spirit, and prepared his system for the disease of which he died.

He was three times married: in 1790, to Elizabeth Michael,

who died on the 10th of November, 1794, leaving two children; on the 12th of June, 1796, to Catharine Antes, who died on the 15th of March, 1810, leaving five children; and on the 16th of October, 1814, to Mary Slough Scott, a widow, who died October 8, 1823.

The feelings which actuated Governor Snyder in the discharge of the duties of a long public service are forcibly expressed in the closing paragraphs of his last annual message to the Legislature: "Having discharged as well the Constitutional injunction as those duties assigned by law, and recommended what in my judgment would promote the public weal, it remains for me to add, that it has ever given me the purest pleasure to co-operate with the General Assembly in such measures as were calculated to perpetuate the happiness of our constituents; that in the discharge of executive functions I was ever solicitous to collect my duty from a just appreciation of every circumstance by which it might be affected. I heard with attention, and endeavored to decide with integrity. I had a wish, it is true, to regard the public voice, and I confess myself to have been ambitious to conciliate and enjoy the public confidence. But I could never abandon the superior claims of self-approbation and conscious rectitude. Satisfied on these points, (and ever aware that in the performance of executive duties by a merely practical man it is difficult, if not impossible, to avoid error,) I have ever acted without in the least regarding what the world might say about it; and those who know me best can bear witness that I have borne with patience the consequences which, to me, have casually resulted from them. For the errors I may have committed, I am consoled with the reflection that perhaps no important good was ever altogether free from alloy, and that my fellow-citizens will, I trust, charitably find a palliation in the motive which at any time may have misled me. The confidence and support which I have experienced from my fellow-citizens for the greater portion of an active life, have impressed my mind with deep and lasting gratitude. A consciousness of having

with diligence and fidelity endeavored to discharge the duties which a partial public has on various occasions assigned me, and of the liberality which has been evinced towards me by a succession of legislatures during an arduous administration, heightens the satisfaction I have in surrendering it to an able successor. And whilst I bid you, and my fellow-citizens generally, an affectionate farewell, I implore for my country the blessings of an all-wise superintending Providence."