

1731.

HISTORY

—OF—

CUMBERLAND COUNTY,

PENNSYLVANIA,

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

BY

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AND OTHERS.

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DR. GEORGE STEVENSON.—In view of the number and character of the military personages furnished by Carlisle, in the olden times, it has been justly called the “nursery of brave officers,”* and among these we place Dr. George Stevenson. It is true that the latter

*Denney's Military Journal, p. 239.

part of his life was spent in Pittsburgh, but a large portion of it belonged to Carlisle, where as at Pittsburgh, he was a leading and influential citizen; and as the family may be regarded among our historical families, there is an evident propriety that this sketch should be as full as necessary brevity will admit, especially as the subject of it was one of those worthies who wisely and earnestly endeavored to secure a country, government, and institutions now second to none in all the elements of popular happiness and prosperity, and for which posterity, should be ever grateful. His father, George Stevenson, L. L. D., was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1718, and had emigrated to America, near the middle of the last century. He had previously graduated at Trinity College in his native city, and being an excellent classical scholar opened a school at New Castle, Delaware, where he contributed to the education of those who became, more or less, prominent in the busy scenes of life. He was a practical surveyor, then an important character, and was subsequently appointed Deputy Surveyor General, under Nicolas Scull for the three lower counties on the Delaware, called "the territories of Pennsylvania," the right to which William Penn obtained from James Duke, of York, in 1682.

Afterwards, Mr. Stevenson moved from New Castle to York, Pennsylvania, and there commenced the practice of law, which he successfully pursued. As an evidence of his worth in this regard, he was commissioned a judge of the counties of York and Cumberland, his commission bearing date 1755, and in the reign of George the Second.

He had become a very large land holder and engaged in the manufacture of iron. He with William Thompson, and George Ross, afterwards a signer of the Declaration of Independence, erected and owned what was called Mary Ann Furnace in York county, as early as 1764. As well as Spring Forge a few miles distant from the furnace.

In 1769, Mr. Stevenson moved to Carlisle and embarked as a pioneer in the iron business, at the place called Mount Holly, about seven miles south of town. In this enterprise, however, owing to the dishonesty of another, he became greatly reduced, and returned to the practice of the law. He took a prominent part in the affairs of our country at that early period, and some of his correspondence may be seen in the Colonial Records and Pennsylvania Archives. He died in Carlisle, in 1783, and his widow in 1791. He had married Mrs. Mary Cookson, the sister of General William Thompson and widow of Mr. Thomas Cookson a distinguished lawyer of Lancaster, who had been instructed with Nicolas Scull to lay out the town of Carlisle, in 1751. By this marriage, George Stevenson was born in York, Pennsylvania, in 1759. Three daughters completed the family. Nancy married John Holmes, of Baltimore, an eminent merchant and polished gentleman. Catharine married General John Wilkins, of Pittsburgh, brother of the Honorable William Wilkins, and Mary married Dr. James Armstrong, son of old General Armstrong, of Kintanaming memory.

Young Stevenson was attending a classical academy established in Carlisle by an Irish clergyman, Rev. Henry McKinley, and there he remained until the school was broken up by the war in 1778, the teacher and several of his pupils accepting commissions in the army, and of this number our youthful patriot was one, being appointed a first lieutenant in Chambers' Regiment, the first of the Pennsylvania line. In this capacity, as stated in a letter by General John Armstrong, Secretary of War under Madison, he was "highly esteemed for merits professional and personal." In the field, at the battle of Brandywine, he was distinguished for his gallantry by drawing off,

under a shower of canister and grape-shot a piece of artillery that had been abandoned. He subsequently drew an admirable plan of that battle, still in the possession of the family, a duplicate copy of which he presented to General LaFayette on the occasion of his visit to the battle-field in September, 1825, on the day of the anniversary celebration of it. With his corps he spent the memorable winter of 1777-78 at Valley Forge.

But family circumstances calling him home, he resigned his commission in the latter part of 1778, and commenced the study of medicine in Carlisle with Dr. McCoskey, the father of the Bishop of the Diocese of Michigan. Afterwards he re-entered the army as a surgeon, and there remained until the close of the war. He then returned to Carlisle, and resumed the civil practice of his profession.

In 1794, to aid in suppressing the whiskey insurrection in western Pennsylvania he commanded the Carlisle Infantry, organized ten years previously, a company whose admirable drill and equipment, as well as personnel, won the high commendation of Washington, who remained in Carlisle a few days at that time.

He was commissioned Captain of the Infantry, by Governor Mifflin, Aug. 28, 1793, and the company had in its ranks several of the most distinguished men in the community, as is evident from the following extract taken from a journal kept by Mr. Andrew Holmes, one of the members of the company:

"Saturday, October 11th, 1794, at two o'clock P. M., the Carlisle Light Infantry together with three or four thousand troops, Cavalry, Rifle and Infantry marched from Carlisle to Mount Rock. The officers of the Carlisle Infantry were as follows:

Captain, George Stevenson; 1st. Lieut., Robert Miller; 2nd. Lieut. William Miller; Ensign, Thomas Creigh; Orderly Sergeant, William Armor; Sergeant Major, George Hacket; Drum Major, James Holmes and 52 privates—among whom were Thomas Duncan, David Watts, John Lyon, Andrew Holmes, Nathaniel Weakley, Archibald Loudon, Thomas Foster, Robert McClure, Archibald Ramsey, Francis Gibson, &c."

At Sideling Hill Captain Stevenson was made Major. "After a tour of service along the Monongahela and at Fort Pitt, the company was mustered out, and returned to Carlisle by way of Strawsburg, December 5th, 1794." We can easily conceive what a handsome military officer Dr. Stevenson made, being very tall, perfectly erect, well proportioned, manly and commanding in his bearing.

After the settlement of the whiskey troubles Dr. Stevenson removed his family to Pittsburgh, when he resumed the practice of medicine.

When war was expected with France in 1798, Dr. Stevenson was commissioned Major in the tenth United States Regiment, in what was known as Adams' Provincial Army. He had the supervision of all the recruiting service in this state west of the Alleghenies, and had his headquarters at Pittsburgh (and thence he conducted the obsequies of Washington). Mr. Jefferron's accession to the Presidency led to disbanding the army, and Dr. Stevenson returned to his civil practice.

During a dark hour of financial pressure in public affairs, and as a matter of immediate relief in the Autumn of 1812, when the banking institutions of the borough of Pittsburgh could give no further aid and Treasury drafts on the Bank of Pennsylvania remained useless, Dr. Stevenson and Major Kirkpatrick staked their "private fortunes and credit to the last cent" to sustain the operations in the Quarter Master's Department at Pittsburgh so necessary to a vigorous and successful prosecution of the war. This offer was accepted to the amounts of upwards of forty thousand dollars, and effected the purposes in-

tended by it to the fullest extent as subsequently stated in a most gratifying letter to Dr. Stevenson, by the commanding officer, R. Johnston, an honorable instance of his true patriotism, not less than his strong faith in the stability of the Republic! And this was done when Dr. Stevenson was a Federalist, and the administration Democratic.

For many years he was among the very foremost friends and patrons of a high education, and served as a trustee of Dickinson College, Carlisle, from 1792 to 1827. He was also one of the founders of the Western University of Pennsylvania at Pittsburgh in 1819, now in a very flourishing condition, and he was the efficient President of the Board of Trustees associated with such sterling men as Francis Herron, Jonathan Walker, William Wilkins, Henry Baldwin, Harman Denny, Walter Forwards, Morgan Neville, Peter Mowry and others, all eminent citizens of Pittsburgh who have not had their superiors in the community, in purity of character, and unselfish devotion to the public good.

Dr. Stevenson had served as Chief Burgess of Pittsburgh, when it was only a borough, and he had been for a long time President of the City Council until he removed from the place. As a borough it was incorporated in 1794, and as a city in 1816. He was one of the first directors of the Branch Bank of Pennsylvania, established at Pittsburgh in 1804, the very first bank ever established west of the Allegheny Mountains and afterwards merged in the office of the Banks of the United States; General James O'Hara was the President of it.

It is worthy of mention here, that of the first directors of this first bank, six had been officers in the army of the Revolution, Ebenezer Denny, Abraham Kirkpatrick, Presley Neville, George Stevenson, Adamson Fannehill and John Wilkins. Indeed many of the original settlers had been such men, and "made quite a colony of retired officers at De-un-da-ga, the Seneca name for Pittsburgh and literally signifying The Forks.

Dr. Stevenson was not only a director but President of the U. S. Bank in Pittsburgh at the time that Longdon Cheres was President of the Mother Bank in Philadelphia. When the latter gentleman had concluded to retire from his high and responsible position he received a friendly letter from Dr. Stevenson, and in his reply of December 14, 1822, Mr. Cheres says: I can with great truth and sincerity reciprocate your kind expressions concerning our official relations. Under your auspices and very much by your personal exertions, the office at Pittsburgh has not only been rescued from great danger and losses, but has been restored to something like prosperity. In my immediate duties concerning that office I have acted with a confidence and ease of mind which would have been denied me if I had not known and felt that I was acting with a gentleman and man of honor, &c." Nicholas Biddle succeeded Cheres, and in a letter to Dr. Stevenson under date of April 12, 1825, he apprises him of the re-organization of the U. S. Bank at Cincinnati, and that the Doctor was elected first director, with the decided wish of the board that he should be chosen to preside over the office. And then Mr. Biddle adds: The board indeed feel great pleasure at the circumstances that in resuming its business in a place where the Bank has suffered so deeply, and when all their experience warns them to proceed with the utmost caution they are able to connect with the management of their affairs a gentleman who has so long enjoyed their utmost confidence, and on whose integrity and discretion they can rely so entirely, &c." How delightfully refreshing now-a-days to read such testimony from such a source, and under such circumstances! He did not, however, go to what became the acknowledged commercial metropo-

lis of the West, and we need not here conjecture or predict the results had he gone; but not long afterwards he moved to Wilmington, Delaware, and there spent the brief balance of his useful and honored life.

He was also one of the original members of the "General Society of the Cincinnati," instituted in 1783. When he died his son, Henry Stevenson, M. D., U. S. Army, as the "eldest male branch, succeeded the father in 1830, and when he died, not having a son, then his brother, Dr. T. C. Stevenson, now of Carlisle, succeeded to the honor in 1854, and has at present in his possession, among other valuable relics and souvenirs of the past, the original diploma of membership which belonged to his excellent and honored father.

As a physician, Dr. Stevenson was well read and judicious, and in his large practice he was eminently kind and skillful. As a citizen, he was public spirited, highly esteemed, and exerted a large and controlling influence, socially, commercially and politically, and his is among a few family names mentioned in Brackenridge's Recollections of the West, as names which will long be handed down by tradition.

In estimating his character we are authorized to say that he was a man of broad views, and strong convictions, possessing a superior judgment with all the instincts and impulses of a high-toned gentleman, and with such an intimate and nicely cultured sense of honor and honesty, that inspired lasting confidence and commanded the greatest admiration—a character—the richest and most precious legacy a father could bequeath to his children, or to the community.

The worthy subject of this sketch left Pittsburgh in 1825, and removed to Wilmington, Delaware, where his long and useful life was finished in 1829.

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