

HISTORY  
OF  
WARREN COUNTY  
PENNSYLVANIA

*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES  
OF SOME OF ITS PROMINENT MEN AND PIONEERS*

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CHAPTER LVI.

## BIOGRAPHICAL.

STRUTHERS, THOMAS. The subject of this sketch was born in Trumbull (now Mahoning) county, O., on the 6th day of June, 1803. His father, John Struthers, came of a Scotch family, and, imbued with the spirit of adventurous enterprise characteristic of that hardy race, removed with his father's family from the State of Maryland to Washington county, Pa., in 1776. By reason of his skill as a practical land surveyor he rendered invaluable assistance to the settlers then crowding into that region; and by reason of his military prowess he rose to the command of a company of mounted rangers, who were commended for their courage and skill in protecting the government from the fierce onslaughts of the desperate and savage allies of the British during the Revolutionary War. He married a Miss Foster, of Irish extraction, and with a family of four children removed to Trumbull county, O., in 1798, where he settled on lands that he had previously selected during his excursions as an Indian hunter. He was thus one of the first settlers in the Connecticut Western Reserve, which from that time became rapidly peopled with immigrants from New England and Pennsylvania. Here he cleared and cultivated a large farm, built mills, and in company with Robert Montgomery, erected a small blast furnace, the product of which was cast into pots, kettles,

caldrons, and such other articles as were demanded by the household necessities of the settlers. He afterward unfortunately met with disastrous business reverses.

On this farm, some eighty-four years ago, Thomas Struthers was born and disciplined in the then undeveloped mysteries of agriculture. He obtained his early education in the common schools of the time; during intervals of farm work, prepared for and entered Jefferson College at the age of seventeen years, worked his own way through, and after graduation entered the law office of A. W. Foster, of Greensborough, Westmoreland county, Pa. In December, 1828, one year and eleven months after his admission to the bar, he opened an office in Warren, Pa., which has ever since been his home, and, as we shall see, the object of his pride and bounty. He was partly induced to settle here by offers of agencies by owners of large tracts of disposable wild lands in north-western Pennsylvania, but chiefly by his belief that the best thing for a young man to do was to cast his lot among the pioneers of a new and promising country, and keep step with the march of improvements. There were only about five hundred voters in Warren county at that time. His success in the practice of his profession was active from the first, though he found his commissions from the sale of land more profitable. His unwavering fidelity to his clients, his diligent efforts in their behalf, and the signal ability with which he discharged the duties imposed upon him, soon established for him a most gratifying reputation. He was from the beginning so successful in disposing of lands and turning the tide of immigration in this direction, that he was encouraged to purchase large tracts on time, and pay for them by the proceeds of resales, at a moderate advance. The greatest difficulty with which he had to contend in this work was the utter want of railroad or other facilities by which to reach these lands. "Here" it has been well said, "was a broad expanse of almost unbroken forest lands, partly in the State of New York and partly in the State of Pennsylvania; probably one hundred and fifty miles north and south by two hundred and fifty or three hundred miles east and west; not penetrated even by good wagon roads; and in some directions one hundred and fifty miles without any roads, and this, too, in the direct line between New York city and the West, and Philadelphia and Lake Erie. The State of Pennsylvania had left it intact by her line of canals and railroads on the south, whilst the Erie Canal passed around to the north." His attention was thus directed to the incipient movements on foot for the construction of railroads through one part or another of this wilderness. Whilst he preferred a road from Philadelphia, by the route now occupied by the Philadelphia and Erie (originally the Sunbury and Erie) railway, and a branch by the Catawissa and Lehigh Valley to New York, he found the projectors of the New York and Erie road first in the field, and hastened to give them all the encouragement he could, attended many of their primary meetings held along the proposed line, aided them in

getting the necessary right of way through Pennsylvania, and in other ways evinced his interest in the scheme.

In 1836 efforts were first made to establish a line between Philadelphia and the great lakes, and Mr. Struthers, as a delegate from Warren county, attended the first convention held at Williamsport. Here was developed the scheme for the Sunbury and Erie road, and Mr. Struthers, with others, appointed to lay the subject before the Legislature and induce, if possible, that body to adopt the appropriate measures. A bill was accordingly introduced early in the session of 1836-37, but the members of the Legislature, from their ignorance of the character of the northwestern part of Pennsylvania and of the trade of the lakes, looked upon the scheme as altogether absurd and chimerical. The committee thought it best, therefore, not to urge precipitate action on the measure, but gradually to educate and interest the southern and eastern members in the geography and unbounded resources of that region, and the importance of the lake trade, and thus win their approval. By virtue of his zeal and of his more intimate knowledge of the country, Mr. Struthers was requested by the Philadelphia gentlemen who had been chosen to act with him, to pilot the measure through to its enactment. After months of untiring work he succeeded in obtaining the passage of the bill, though he did not dare bring it to a vote until April, 1837.

In the subsequent organization of the company Mr. Struthers was chosen one of the directors, the others being of Philadelphia and east of the mountains, while the accomplished financier, Nicholas Biddle, was made president. After elaborate surveys made in 1838-39, the location of the line and the beginning of the work of grading in 1840, operations were suspended by the recurrence of the financial panic of 1837, the consequent failure of the United States Bank and its associates, and the long train of failures that followed in the wake of these disasters. In 1847 the Philadelphians abandoned the scheme and transferred their efforts to the Pennsylvania road. This project was not dead, however, and Mr. Struthers, with sublime faith and perseverance, despite a host of discouraging circumstances, obtained a revival of the company and its works in 1851. Philadelphia returned to her allegiance and subscriptions came in from all along the line. To prevent the subscriptions from the west from being conveyed to the east, Mr. Struthers placed himself at the head of a company associated at Warren, while a similar company was formed at Erie. These parties took contracts covering eighty-six miles of the western division, receiving the municipal bonds of their several localities and stock of the company for their principal pay, taking only a very small percentage in money. They also rendered aid to the eastern division. The financial operations of the Warren party were managed altogether by Mr. Struthers, to whose energy it is largely due that, while the prosecution of the work on the remainder of the line was suspended nearly two years for lack of means, this party went

steadily forward with their labors, trusting to events for that part of their pay which they were to receive in money—a misplaced confidence, as the subject of our notice realized in a loss of more than all the profits of the contract. However, under a new arrangement he took an individual contract for the completion of a portion of the work, and carried it through. The road was finally completed in 1862.

In the mean time, early in the decade of years that ended with 1860, Mr. Struthers became interested with General Wilson in constructing the first railroad in California, from Sacramento to Folsom, or Negro Bar. When he took hold of the enterprise it was unendowed. By his superior tact and financial ability, he procured in Boston the rails and equipment complete for forty miles of road, to be delivered in San Francisco, without money or other securities than the bonds of the company, and his own and Wilson's guarantee. Soon after this he embarked with others in the enterprise of building street railways in the city of Cincinnati, and obtained from the city council a grant for about half the city, after which he sold out his interest. It was about this time, too, that in company with others, under the supposed protection of an act of the Iowa Legislature, procured for the purpose, he undertook the improvement of the Des Moines River for steam navigation. No sooner had they located their dams, and several towns and cities on the donated lands, then their grant was repudiated by the Legislature.

After the completion of the Sunbury and Erie Road, Mr. Struthers procured the passage of a law incorporating the Oil Creek Railroad Company, with powers to build a line from the Sunbury and Erie Railroad in Warren or Erie county to Titusville, and down Oil Creek and Allegheny River to Franklin. In the year 1862 he organized the company, located the road from Corry to Titusville, a distance of twenty-eight miles, and in one hundred and twenty working days the road was completed, without subsidies from any source, and almost without stock. Finding it almost impossible to inspire the people along the route with confidence in the project, he and his associate, Dr. Streator, took nearly all the stock themselves and built and equipped the road upon its own bonds. The project developed into a remarkable success. He remained the president of the road and chief financial agent until 1866, realizing large profits from its earnings, when he sold his interest, and with his entire family passed a year and a half traveling through Europe, Asia, and Egypt. Previous to his departure, however, he made arrangements for the completion of the Cross-Cut Railroad, which he and Dean Richmond had organized for the purpose of connecting the Oil Creek and New York Central Railroads. After his return from the Old World, and as late as 1870, he, in conjunction with John Stambaugh, John Tod and others, completed the Liberty and Vienna Railroad. Again he was remarkably successful; this road was afterward sold to the Atlantic and Great Western, and Ashtabula, Youngstown and Pittsburgh Railroad

Companies. Mr. Struthers was also one of the projectors of the Youngstown and Canfield Railroad, connecting the Lawrence Railroad with the Kyle and Foster Coal Mines, in which he owned a large interest. Notwithstanding the multitude of his business undertakings, the care of an extensive law practice, his dealings in land, and his various public enterprises, Mr. Struthers had not forgotten the place of his birth. In 1863 he purchased the farm on which he was born, and four years later, in company with several associates whom he had induced to join him, he erected upon it a large blast furnace and built up the prosperous village of Struthers, on the Lawrence Railroad. In the same year, 1867, he purchased an interest for himself and son in a flourishing machine-shop and foundry in Warren, which he extensively enlarged and had incorporated under the name of the "Brown & Struthers Iron Works." In August, 1875, he bought up the entire property of the corporation and founded the firm of Struthers, Wells & Co.

During the period of his management of the Oil Creek Railroad, he established the Corry National Bank, becoming and for years continuing its president.

Mr. Struthers has always been an earnest and active politician of the Whig and Republican persuasion, and a tried friend of the protective tariff system. He represented his district in the State Legislature in the sessions of 1857 and 1858 with distinguished ability, and was a prominent member of the convention of 1872-73 to revise and amend the constitution of the State, serving on important committees. He spent much time and money in aid of the Union cause during the war with the South, filling quotas, etc., and furnished two substitutes, though not subject to service himself.

His course in the Legislature so inspired his fellow-members in that body with confidence in his abilities and integrity, that at the close of his term many of them insisted on his becoming their candidate for State treasurer, to which he was reluctantly constrained to consent. During the canvass for the nomination the following tribute to his worth, one of many published throughout the State, appeared in a paper more than a hundred miles from the district he represented :

"Among the Republican gentlemen named as candidates for the responsible office of State treasurer, the Hon. Thomas Struthers, of Warren county, stands conspicuous. His sterling integrity, business capacity, and the efficient services he has rendered to the political cause upheld by the great Republican party, render him, in our opinion, by far the most suitable and available candidate. The West, we think, is now entitled to the office, more especially when one so capable and trustworthy is presented. During the sessions of 1857 and 1858, Mr. S. represented in the State Legislature, first the counties of Warren, Venango, and Mercer, and afterwards Warren and Crawford. Those who served with him during two sessions can testify to the important character of his services to the State and to his party.

“We agree with the *Reading Journal* when it says to the members of the present Legislature, let us for once have a State treasurer upon whom we can look without suspicion or distrust; in whose past life and freedom from evil financial associations the people can have some guaranty of future honesty. There are such men before the people. Give us one of them if only for this once. Give us a man of pure and spotless honesty, not one whose name has been dragged in the mire. Give us a man whom we can hold up before the people as a servant worthy of their confidence, as a servant of the kind in whom they will be well pleased.”

Neither his business nor private inclinations permitted him to give the canvass the attention necessary to obtain the nomination. He had no political aspirations. To aid in developing the resources of the country by public improvements, was ever his highest ambition and greatest pride.

The work for which he will be longest remembered is the magnificent structure known as the Struthers Library Building, which was built for the borough by Mr. Struthers in the winter of 1883, at an expense of about \$90,000 in addition to the site, which was furnished by the citizens. It is described in the history of Warren in this work.

Mr. Struthers's “predominant mental characteristic,” says one who has for many years been closely associated with him by the ties of friendship and business connection, “is concentrativeness. He would always become totally absorbed in the project or enterprise in hand, and pursue it with an avidity and pertinacity that admitted of no diversion or interruption. His mental resources in extricating himself from embarrassment, and in combining agencies to accomplish his purpose, have always proven sufficient for all drafts upon them and seem inexhaustible, and his power for attracting both men and capital and enlisting them in his adventures, is wonderful. His temperament is over-sanguine, producing too favorable estimates of future results, and would often have led him into serious difficulties, except for his indomitable will and perseverance. He never surrendered, and consequently was always victorious, or made a draw game of it.

“He has always shown himself emphatically to be what Carlyle said of Cromwell, ‘an earnest man.’ Whatever his hand has found to do he has done with his might. Bold, apparently to rashness, and hopeful to enthusiasm, whatever he has undertaken he has carried through with an earnestness and energy that surmounted all obstacles. These elements in his composition induced him sometimes to venture too much, perhaps, and take risks which the timid prudence of less resolute men would have avoided. He would buy, on time, far beyond his income from other sources to pay, trusting to sell at an advance before the liability matured. Yet no protests came. He would spread more canvass and run farther out to sea than larger crafts dare venture, yet his frail bark, through calm or storm, always made the voyage bravely, and returned

to port safely. His industry has ever been as indefatigable as his will indomitable. Had he not enjoyed perfect health and great powers of endurance, he would often have overtaxed his energies and broken down.

“Although his travels and associations with the business world have been such as to subject him to frequent and strong temptations, his habits have ever been temperate and free from dissipation of any kind. He, indeed, attributes much of the vigor, both physical and intellectual, which he enjoys at his present advanced age, to the fact that several years ago he abjured the use of spirituous liquors altogether. He seldom indulges even in a glass of beer. He says its use defiles the stomach, vitiates the appetite, destroys the sensitive organs, and results in intellectual stupidity, physical grossness and deformity, and total unfitness for business or society. The medicated wines generally in use he considers equally obnoxious and to be avoided.

“But paramount among his virtues it may be affirmed that he is an honest man. In his immense and complicated business transactions, no one was ever found to charge him successfully with a dishonest or dishonorable act. Naturally a little credulous, although usually cautious, he has sometimes been overreached and involved in litigation. But he has lived through more than forty years of trials without a tarnish upon the escutcheon of his manhood, or a stain on his integrity as a citizen. During all that time he has been the recognized leader, and often the originator of measures calculated to benefit the county and borough in which he has lived, and still enjoys the confidence and esteem of the present, as of the past generation.”

In December, 1831, Mr. Struthers married Miss Eunice Eddy, of Warren, Pa., and reared two children. His son, Thomas E., died in 1872. His daughter, Ann Eliza, was married to Captain George R. Wetmore, a soldier of the war for the Union, and a prominent manufacturer and influential business man. She died in 1880 leaving one son, who is Mr. Struthers's only lineal descendant.

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