

HISTORY
OF THE
COUNTY OF WESTMORELAND,
PENNSYLVANIA,
WITH
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES
OF MANY OF ITS
PIONEERS AND PROMINENT MEN.

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ILLUSTRATED.

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his grandfather. Capt. Christy was then, in the words of Mr. Bigham, "verging on threescore and ten, and although a quiet man, yet at that age all men become fond of telling tales of their childhood. I was constantly in his company from when I was able to run about.

"Nearly all I know of Westmoreland County of the last century I learned from him and a few other neighbors of that age. He had been a quiet, hard-working farmer; he aided to make history, but had never written a line in his life. When he located on the farm on which he lived until his death at the age of eighty-three he has often told me of trouble he had from visits of the Indians and wolves in the night-time. He had made out to keep on good terms with the Indians, and killed wolves by the dozens.

"Remember his location on that farm antedated the organization of Westmoreland seven years. No magistrates or police existed there before the Revolutionary war of 1776. During that war the Indians were hostile and overran the entire county, and more especially the northern part of it. He has told me a thousand tales of Indian visits and the dangers his neighbors encountered. Whenever old folks met to talk over olden times, all that had happened before the burning of Hannastown was the dividing line between the old and the new, almost as marked as Noah's flood of the old world.

"THE SIMPLE HABITS OF THE EARLY SETTLERS.

"Necessity probably forced simple habits upon the original settlers, but for many years it had become the rule. Even the ladies who are fond of show and fine dresses had become reconciled to things as they found them. They had no stores with fashionable goods to tempt the vanity of the young. They had no fashionable churches to exhibit their fine dresses. Their food was of the best and most healthful character, and prepared by their own hand. Most of their clothing was the product of their own looms, wool grown on their own sheep; flax was grown upon their own ground, spun and woven on their own wheels and looms. Tea and coffee could only be procured by long pack-horse journeys of one or two hundred miles. Their log cabins, if not elegant, were healthy. They met on a common platform; no class existed; all were masters, none were servants.

"Their buildings were equally simple. When a young couple married they went into the woods to open up a new farm for themselves. A log cabin of probably two rooms satisfied their ambition. As children multiplied enlarged cabins accommodated them, and finally in my boyhood days nearly all well-to-do farmers had substantial farm-houses, with parlors, dining-rooms, kitchens, and all the appliances of modern civilization. Some had failed and grumbled at their ill luck, generally the result of their own bad management.

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE HON. THOMAS J. BIGHAM.

We have great satisfaction in here giving a very valuable contribution from the pen of the Hon. T. J. Bigham, a gentleman well known for his antiquarian and historical researches, and a native of Westmoreland. The observations he makes are applicable to Northern Westmoreland in an especial manner, but in a general manner to all Westmoreland. Mr. Bigham was born in 1810 in Salem township, near Delmont, where his parents had resided. His maternal grandfather was Capt. James Christy, of the Eighth Pennsylvania.

He was one of the original settlers in the northern part of the county, and had located on a farm on Beaver Run, Salem township, adjoining Delmont, shortly after the close of Pontiac's war, probably between 1766 and 1768. Mr. Bigham's parents having died in infancy, he was brought up in the family of

"PACK-HORSE TRANSPORTATION OF EARLY TIMES.

"For many years nearly all the transportation of that section was carried on by pack-horses. The roads were chiefly bridle-paths through the woods. A wagon-road for Gen. Forbes' army had been opened across the mountains in 1758, but for want of repair had become simply a bridle-path. Land-slides and rolling rocks had left it impassable for wagons. No township supervisors existed to keep roads in repair. The sparse population must have salt and iron for domestic purposes, some groceries, dry-goods, etc., and the only way to get them was by using their horses in the intervals of farm-work. A single horse could carry three or four hundred pounds, securely fastened upon a pack-saddle, and one man could manage half a dozen of them, and in that way transport about a ton across the mountains. Money as a currency was almost unknown; everything was barter or exchange of Western products for Eastern goods, so they had a load in both directions. In the best of weather ten days would be employed to cross the mountains and return. Generally two weeks were required for a trip. The neighbors usually formed a small caravan; fifty or one hundred horses in single file along a path would carry probably ten tons, and for many years this was the mode of mountain transportation. Ordinary wagon-roads, turnpikes, canals, and railroads have superseded all these primitive modes.

"THE EARLY SETTLERS WERE NOT POLITICIANS.

"Even in my boyhood days I never heard half a dozen discussions on partisan politics. The county officers were then appointed by the Governor. No county conventions were then held to nominate a ticket. Whoever aspired to an election announced himself as a candidate in the newspapers. The public would have five or ten candidates for most public offices, and every voter selected for himself. I never heard of a public meeting to discuss pending issues before the election as is now common. The old October elections were held at Greensburg, and one-third of the voters did not usually attend. A governor's election would bring out a much fuller vote. I accompanied my relations to the election between Gregg and Schultz, and was amazed to find the streets of Greensburg crowded with people; never had seen so many people assembled together. Prior to that time the Legislature had, I believe, appointed Presidential electors. I remember my grandfather was quite annoyed when an election by the people was announced for President. The machinery of an electoral ticket was not understood by the masses. Gen. Jackson and the battle of New Orleans they had all heard of, but to vote for thirty-two persons, none of whom they had ever heard of, puzzled them amazingly. 'Why all this change?' said they. 'The legislators probably understand all this. They elected Washington and Jefferson, etc., and we were all satisfied. But here are

thirty-two names of which we know not one, or only one or two of them, and why should we leave our farms and lose a day on this nonsense?' Since the voters have got to understand this complicated machinery, and have spent a month attending party conventions and listening to party discussions they look upon things very differently. My grandfather was a quiet Democrat, and my guardian a still quieter member of the opposition, but neither of them ever spent five minutes in talking to me of party politics or how I ought to vote. In my boyhood days I heard ten discussions on religious subjects for one on politics. I am not certain but things have now gotten too much on the other extreme, too much politics and too little on religion."