

THE
OLD AND NEW
MONONGAHELA.

— BY —
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IRA. R. BUTLER.

Among the early and active class leaders in this church was Ira R. Butler. We insert an interview the author had with him a few years before his death.

His grandfather was born in Bristol, England. His name was Noble Butler, and came to this country in 1716, about two years before the death of Wm. Penn. He landed at Philadelphia and entered under the rules and regulations of Wm. Penn, one thousand acres of land at a very small price in Yeochland township, Chester county. His wife's name was Rachel Jones, of Welsh descent. Noble was a single man when he settled on this large farm, but not long after his arrival he was married. They had twelve children, the youngest of whom was Benjamin, the father of Ira. Noble died on this farm in 1804. Benjamin Butler had as sons and daughters, David, Jonathan, Elizabeth, Abner, Eunice, Noble, Isaac, Benjamin, Joel, Joseph and Ira R. His large family growing rapidly toward maturity, Benjamin Butler, although surrounded by every comfort that wealth and opportunity could afford, began about the beginning of the present century to show a disposition to try his fortunes in the wilds of the Ohio. This increased after the death of his father. To carry out his desires in a satisfactory way, he sent two of his sons on horseback to spy out the new country, with instructions to purchase one well improved farm, and to secure enough in the neighborhood to furnish the family a farm each. They in due time returned with glowing accounts of the Ohio valley, and reported in favor of a section near North Bend on the Ohio river, some distance below Cincinnati. In a short time Father Butler sent the same sons back to secure the property by absolute purchase. On their

return to the homestead in the spring of 1805, the old gentleman sold all he had except such things as were determined to be taken along. After harvest they all bid adieu to the old homestead with its magnificent stone mansion, and with a six-horse wagon, a five-horse wagon, a two-horse carriage and two extra horses the family set out on their journey to Ohio. They traveled by the way of Lancaster, Harrisburg and Bedford, and crossed the Monongahela river at Parkison's Ferry on Sabbath evening the 6th of October, 1805; put up at the tavern of George Trout, long known as the Caldwell stand, on Main street. Next morning the father arose from bed; went to feed the horses so as to be ready for an early start; returned to the house, laid down to await breakfast; when called he was speechless; died before midnight of palsy. Doctors at that time were not convenient, none nearer than Greensburg or the Upper Forks. In the midst of this sudden affliction to the newcomers, it was suggested to send up the country a short distance for a man the name of Miller, who made pretensions to be a general doctor in all things, especially in cows and other animals. He arrived in due time, and with no little degree of pomp and self assurance, pronounced the old gentleman's disease to be yellow fever, supplementing his decisions with the remark that he had powders "for fifty cents each, which, if taken promptly, would prevent the rest of the family, and citizens generally, from taking the disease." Many powders were no doubt disposed of to the credulous. Most of the family were in a short time taken unwell, and within two weeks Isaac died. In the meantime Dr. Marchand, of Greensburg, was called. The history of the case of the old gentleman was related, and he declared it to be a stroke of the palsy; that the rest of the family, from exposure on the journey, had malarial fever. He denounced the cow doctor in severest terms, and on examination found his powders to be made of brick dust and some other as inert substance. He declared he would not hesitate to *cowhide* such a man.

Isaac was buried with his father in the Wickerham graveyard, now in the third ward. In the midst of this sorrow Captain Daniel VanVoorhis called to see and comfort the family. He said, "Boys, if you are not going to use your horses send them up to my farm and turn them into the fort field where the grass is knee deep, and leave them there as long as you deem proper." Ira and one of his brothers salted them regularly, and there Ira saw a bear for the first time, which was a pet of Abraham VanVoorhis, then about 20 years old. Some of the shoes that came off these horses were found a few years since in plowing the field. They are in the possession of John VanVoorhis, the present owner of the field. The death of the father of this family created no little stir in the town; the citizens generally were frightened, and some were so lost to shame as to insist on the Butlers leaving town even in their distress. The father's death necessitated the taking of an inventory of his goods. As this was being done the goods were to be removed to the Red house, now gone, at the mouth of First street, on the river, which had been rented from Samuel Black. Some of the citizens, more nervous than humane, persuaded Mr. Black not to allow the family to occupy the house, though part of the goods had been loaded on the wagons and in the way to the house. He yielded to their demands, leaving them in such a strait as they knew not what to do. At this critical moment appeared among them the good samaritan, Nathan W. Chalfant, saying, "Strangers, I have a house rented down on Race street which I will not need till spring. Drive your wagons to it and unload your goods, and let me see the man who will dare to disturb you." Thus the Butlers became citizens of the town, and their prospects for North Bend blighted. This man Chalfant lived in Brownsville, but was building keel boats in the town, being its first boat builder. His name and that of Capt. VanVoorhis were cherished in fond remembrance by the Butler family, and the Esquire at this day says, "I hardly know anybody else than the VanVoorhis name." Afterwards some time the

family moved into the frame house, then unfinished, opposite the City Hotel, occupied by Keller & Co. The members of the family generally were short lived. One of the boys was thrown from a stage three miles this side of Washington, from the effects of which he died September, 1822. Rachel died 13th of October, 1822. Joel married Betsy, daughter of William Irwin, of whom we have written. Eunice married the late David Woodward, father of Noble and Joseph. She died a few years since, an account of whose death was written by Lewis Bollman and printed in the *Republican*. At this date Ira alone remains. He was born at the old homestead in Chester county, November 15th, 1792. He was married by George Bentley, Esq., to Mary Boyd, June 14th, 1822. She was born October 23d, 1801, at New London Cross Roads, Chester county. She died September 7th, 1874. Ira and his wife first set up housekeeping in what was long known as the Peggy Speers house, in Catsburg. In 1812 he kept store with his brother Benjamin in the house now occupied by T. H. Baird, Esq., on Main street, known as the Stewart property. He sold eggs for three to four cents per dozen, butter six to ten cents per pound, home made sugar $6\frac{1}{4}$ cents per pound, there was no other kind of sugar sold; used tallow candles for light in candlesticks of tin with brass mountings and about ten inches high. As people generally made their own wearing material from flax and tow, there was not much finery sold in the stores.

The mercantile business did not agree with his health. He sold out, went to Lake Erie, where he secured employment as super-cargo on the sailing vessel "Union of the Grand River," Captain Martin, Master. The boat was chartered by the North American Fur Company, of which John J. Astor was president, to bring furs and other goods from Fort Mackinaw, after its surrender to the British forces by Captain Darragh, brother of the late Daniel Darragh, of Mingo. One of the terms of the surrender permitted private citizens to take away their property. He was on the same vessel three years, during two of which he was captain of the craft, and hence he ac-

quired the title of Captain Butler. In the winter of 1815 he returned to Williamsport and followed boat building. He moved from the Peggy Speers house to the Woodward place, where John Lamb first had his tan yard. He subsequently bought the property opposite the paper mill, and in 1837 built the brick house in which he lived until in 1841 he moved to his present residence. He sold his property opposite the paper mill to Douglas McFarland, father of Campbell McFarland, Esq., and Rev. John McFarland, who died some years ago in Greenfield, Dade county, Missouri. He bought his present residence from a man the name of Stockdale, who, we think, purchased it from the Baxters.

On the 12th day of May, 1880, we called on Esq. Butler. He was not at home, but was informed that he would be home shortly, as he only walked down to the blackmith's at Victory coal works, and as he was a good walker would soon be back. I thought to myself, a pretty good walk for a man 88 years old. In a short time I heard him on the porch, met him with an extended hand; looking me in the eyes, says: "I believe I do not know you." Giving him a gentle hint who I was, he exclaimed, "Why, John, I hav'n't seen you for thirty years. Set down, I am very glad to see you."

I soon discovered that he was a perfect encyclopædia of the past; his recollection clear; his conversational powers unimpaired; his body erect; in fact a man extraordinarily well preserved. He has preserved all his papers bearing on his history, business and travels. Still has his copy books used when at school in 1807; a memorandum of miscellany during his life; a detailed description of a journey in a flatboat from Williamsport to Orleans; his experience on Lake Erie, in fact the sum total of a long, active life on paper. After giving me a sketch of his family as above, only at length, I gathered from him much in a desultory way.

Well, Esq., which house do you think was first built in town?
Ans. The log part of the old Parkison mansion. Who was the first cabinet maker? Joseph McClure, who made my father's

coffin, and under whom the late John Eckles learned his trade. His shop was across the alley from the City Hotel, in which Joseph Hamilton afterwards had his cabinet shop. By whom and when was the City Hotel built? Washington Palmer, in 1811, just before he went out in Capt. James Warne's company to the war of 1812, this company being a part of Pennsylvania's first quota. Who built the old Glass Works, now gone? Parkison, Warne & Co., in 1816. The company consisted of William Parkison, James Warne, Joel and Benjamin Butler. Haywood did the job at a cost of \$27,000 before it was ready to start. At the first blast the cap fell in and in fact the whole was a failure. It was sold at sheriff's sale to Samuel Black and J. and R. McGrew, who rented it to Wm. Ihmsen. How about Catsburg? When Esq. James Mitchell laid out East Williamsport in 1811, the widow Biddie Caldwell and her daughter were the only inhabitants on the site, and their cabin was the only dwelling except the old log house in which Daniel DePue had resided, on the point at the mouth of the creek. Biddie's cabin was situated in the orchard on the slope of the hill above the residence of the widow Collins. Biddie and her daughter were constantly quarrelling, squealing, pulling hair and crying like cats. So prominent a feature were these qualities that the household was called the "cat and kittens," and the people on the other side of the creek very soon took hold of the idea of calling the new town Catsburg, despite of the Esq.'s name. Who gave the old graveyard lot? William Parkison. The new addition was purchased by a general subscription under the supervision of the late Joseph Wilson. Who was Thomas Wells? The first saddle and harness maker in town. Who built the first saw mill? William Johnson, the father-in-law of William Layman. It stood not far from Neel, Blythe & Co.'s mills. In building boats before this time the creek mills sawed the timber into plank, but the whip-saw made it into shape. "Well, Esq., I must go." "If you must go," says he. "I want you to call again and I will give you a detail of the building of the town, and how I used to

work for my old friend, Abram Van Voorhis, and others for 62½ cents per day.”

Ira Butler died at his home in Carroll township, July 18, 1884. The *Daily Republican* in a notice of his death says, “His funeral took place on Sunday, July 20, from his old homestead, and was followed to Monongahela cemetery by the largest concourse of people that has ever been seen at the obsequies of any citizen in this part of the country. His death occurred at ten o’clock on Friday night, and the funeral was announced for two o’clock on Sabbath. Long before the hour appointed for the interment hundreds of people in scores of vehicles had collected at the venerated old man’s residence to do honor to the memory of one who had lived among them a monument of honesty, uprightness and purity. The pall bearers were Wm. Galbraith, Wm. Coulter, David Rabe and Joseph Warne. The funeral was under the direction of Capt. A. D. O’Donovan. The casket furnished was of oak, draped with black cloth. On the plate was the following inscription :

CAPT. IRA REESE BUTLER,
AGED 91 YEARS, 8 MONTHS AND 3 DAYS.

Dr. Nesbitt, pastor of the Methodist Church of this city, officiated on the occasion, and in his discourse alluded feelingly and appropriately to the long life and Christian example of the deceased. The emblem of the sheaf of wheat placed upon the casket fitly illustrated that the harvest had been gathered and his many years of usefulness was to be well rewarded by the enjoyment of a bright and glorious beyond. He had been a consistent member of the Methodist Church of this city for over seventy years, having connected himself with it in its infancy, when about twenty-two years of age. Captain Butler was truly one of the pioneers of Washington county, and the many scraps of local history connected with his life would be of great interest to the general reader. About 1815 he was captain of a sailing vessel on the lakes, where he was accustomed to put in his time in the business season, returning to Monongahela City to spend the winter with his friends and family. In June,

1880, we published from the pen of our valued correspondent, Dr. Van Voorhis, reminiscences of Mr. Butler and family from which we to-day reprint a few extracts." These extracts were inserted in a former part of this article. Ira R. Butler was the last of seven sons, all of whom are now dead. The Captain left behind him eight children—Benjamin F., now deceased (1889), Ira William and Mrs. Dr. Keys, Mrs. James Blythe, Mrs. Pratt, Mrs. Keechline and Miss Sarah, all residing in or about Monongahela City.