

HISTORY
OF THE
COUNTIES
OF
McKEAN, ELK AND FOREST,
PENNSYLVANIA,

WITH
BIOGRAPHICAL SELECTIONS,

INCLUDING
THEIR EARLY SETTLEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT; A DESCRIPTION OF THE HISTORIC AND
INTERESTING LOCALITIES; SKETCHES OF THEIR CITIES, TOWNS AND VILLAGES;
PORTRAITS OF PROMINENT MEN; BIOGRAPHIES OF REPRESENTATIVE
CITIZENS; OUTLINE HISTORY OF PENNSYLVANIA; STATISTICS, ETC.

ILLUSTRATED.

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ORLO J. HAMLIN, whose name is identified with the old bar of this district as the pioneer and leading lawyer of that bar in this county, came to Smethport in December, 1826. He was born at Sharon, Conn., December 2, 1803, but at the age of eleven years moved to Pennsylvania with his parents, where, in Wayne and Bradford counties, he resided until the date of his settlement in McKean county. Sometime during the year 1824 he was appointed teacher of the pioneer school at Towanda, Bradford county. While holding that position, he read law in the office of Simon Kinney, and there was admitted to the bar two years later. In the fall of 1826, determining to seek his fortune in a newer country, he set out for Warren, Penn. From his pencil notes of this trip, the description of the country from Galeton to Coudersport, given in the local chapters of Potter county, is taken; while his reminiscences of his first twenty-four hours at Smethport are given in the chapters on the courts

and bar, and in the one on Smethport. Shortly after his arrival at Smethport, he was called upon by John King (the agent of the Keatings), Jonathan Colegrove (the agent of the Ridgways) and Solomon Sartwell (the lumberman and merchant), who received him cordially, and prevailed upon him to make his home among them. He came a little too late to participate in the proceedings of the first court (September, 1826), but was in time for the December term, when he and John W. Howe were admitted *ex gratia* members of the bar of McKean county. In the summer of 1828 Miss Orra L. Cogswell arrived from Connecticut on a visit to her uncle, Jonathan Colegrove. By this time the young lawyer had won the esteem of the pioneers, and it is not a matter for wonder to learn that his suit for Miss Cogswell's heart and hand was favorably received by the grim old soldier of 1812, who was *de facto* guardian of the young lady's interests during her absence from Connecticut. The marriage of the pioneer lawyer and Miss Cogswell was solemnized that year, and for over half a century they resided here together, the center of a large circle of friends and of a happy family. In 1831 and 1832 Mr. Hamlin wrote the historical sketch published in Hazzard's Gazetteer of that year, the first history ever written of any section of the district. His political life may be said to have begun in 1828, when he took a leading part in the campaign. Four years later he represented his district in the legislature, and in the winter of 1832-33 he urged the bill appropriating \$20,000 for the improvement of the east and west State road through McKean county. His speech on this occasion continued for two hours, and won the attention of all readers throughout the commonwealth, owing to the excellence of the language, style and logical conclusion employed by the speaker. The bill, however, failed to receive a majority vote, as did also one for the extension of the canal up the north branch of the Susquehanna, which he earnestly espoused. Undeterred by the defeat of two such measures, he introduced a bill to organize the Eighteenth judicial district—Potter, McKean, Warren and Jefferson counties. He placed this measure before the house in such a strong light, that a legislature, which opposed everything necessitating further State or county taxes, was compelled to coincide with his views, so that, though the opposition was strong in numbers and influence, this bill was carried, and the perseverance of the young legislator rewarded. In the fall of 1833 he was nominated for re-election, but his name not being placed on the legislative ticket in Lycoming county, he withdrew, and in 1835 refused a third nomination unconditionally.

In July, 1836, he was admitted to the bar of the supreme court at Sunbury, and in 1837 practiced before the United States District Court at Williamsport, Penn., representing the defendant in the ejection suit for possession of all the Trimble lands in McKean county. The constitutional convention of 1836 and 1838, which framed the constitution of Pennsylvania, claimed him as a representative of this northern district, with Hiram Payne, alternate. The poor state of Mr. Hamlin's health compelled him to retire from the convention, leaving his views of the subjects he had presented and discussed to Mr. Payne, who voted in accordance with them. At this convention his proposition to give each county a separate representative was negatived. In 1874 a similar proposition was adopted. In 1839 Judge Eldred resigned, and a meeting was held to consider the choice of his successor as president judge. Solomon Sartwell presided, with J. E. Niles, secretary. This meeting resolved that Mr. Hamlin should be appointed, and the resolutions were forwarded to the governor, to be presented by Senators S. Hays and A. V. Parsons and Representatives W. P. Wilcox and L. B. Cole. Other influences, supported by a more persistent candidate, militated against the wish of the people in this

instance. In 1841 and 1842 his name was prominent among the candidates for congressional honors. The *Democrat Analyzer*, of Troy, in February, 1842, speaking on the subject of his nomination, quotes John Sergeant, president of the constitutional convention, as follows: "I am very much impressed with the force of Mr. Hamlin's arguments, and would take this opportunity of saying that McKean county is ably represented." Writing in 1852, he states that he filled the offices of township collector; deputy postmaster; deputy prothonotary; recorder and register; treasurer of the township road funds for two years; postmaster, three years; deputy United States marshal, to take the census of 1830; deputy attorney-general for McKean and Potter counties; and, in 1832, member of the legislature. He makes the further statement: "Complaint has never reached my ear of mismanagement in any of the offices, and I could have held them longer had I chosen to do so. I have learned to consider office rather as a matter of accident and peculiar fortune than the result of talent and management, and I have observed that those who seem most desirous of office are least fortunate in obtaining it. Consistency in politics should never be lost sight of." After resigning his seat in the convention in 1837, Mr. Hamlin partially recovered from the effects of the fatigue and study to which he was subjected during his service in that body, and at intervals gave some attention to political affairs and to his legal business. Though physically weak, he was fortunate in the possession of rare mental power. An analyst by nature, he was logical in all things, and each proposition submitted for his opinion or action was subjected to this process of logical dissection, so that when the conclusion was reached it was an eminently just and proper one. His successful law practice, up to 1851, is a testimonial to his high reasoning powers. In 1849 he engaged in his last criminal case, when he aided the district attorney in the trial of Uzza Robbins, who was convicted of murder. He also made the dedicatory address at the opening of the old court-house, or second public building, which gave place to the present temple of justice. For over twenty years prior to his death, he had surrendered all hope of ever again appearing in court. To fill out the blank which this involuntary retirement from the courts created, he entered on new studies, taking up successfully the French and German languages, astronomy, geology and zoology, in which studies he was accustomed to consult and procure the physical assistance of members of his family. About 1870, Dr. Keating of Philadelphia, a grandson of John Keating, and a life-long friend of the lawyer, was called to his bedside. The doctor naturally expected to be interrogated in the matter of the patient's condition, but professional surprise may be imagined when Mr. Hamlin said: "Well, doctor, I have been reading the Marseillaise Hymn; I know you are a French scholar; I have it in the original as well as the translation; now I want you to take it in the French and translate it slowly; while I compare the translation, to see whether the translator is right or whether I am." The doctor assented, and when he came to the verse which gave the patient special anxiety, the latter said: "Now please be accurate." At the conclusion of the reading, a smile gladdened the invalid's face and he said: "I thought I was right, now I've proved it; you can tell me now what you can do to make a sick man well."

In his early years, Mr. Hamlin was somewhat skeptical with regard to the immortality of the soul, but in the year 1845 he became a member of the Presbyterian Church of Smethport, having received baptism at the hands of Rev. B. T. Babbitt of that communion. From that time to the close his faith grew stronger and more firm, as will be seen in the following lines written by himself, called:

THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS.

For a sick man whose sands of life are nearly run, when all experiments to regain health have failed, when even all possible hope is extinguished and Fate has put on him the seal of despair, and there is naught to look to as the future of Earth, of all consolations the ever busy imagination can unfold, the thought that he knows that God exists, that there is a God, and believes in Christ as his Mediator and Savior, and hopes for immortality, and believes that when life has once begun, we live forever; that death, instead of being a cessation of life, is but a change. It may be a fanciful one, from mortal to immortal, that when we die we shall sleep, not so, but sleep with our fathers; and when we awaken from that sleep, be it long or short, we shall awaken to everlasting life, with our bodily infirmities, our diseases, our cares, our sorrows, our weaknesses, both of body and mind, gone, all gone forever, being born again into a new, holy and perfect state of being. This is the most glorious, joyful, happy and, to find the fullest expression, most grand and sublime thought that can be conceived by mortals, and the one of all others that gives me most happiness.

October 2, 1870.

O. J. H.

Mr. Hamlin's death took place, February, 13, 1880, the result of total exhaustion of the physical system. It was the end of an invalid condition of almost thirty years' duration, and consequently was painless and peaceful. His widow died April 17, 1881, in her seventy-sixth year, within that home in which she dwelt for fifty-three years. The fact of Mr. Hamlin's death was presented to the court in February, 1880, by Hon. C. B. Curtis, then residing in Erie, but practicing in this court, when the official action, reported as follows, resulted. Mr. Curtis said: "If the court please, I wish to announce to the court and bar that Orlo J. Hamlin breathed his last in this town on the 13th day of the present month. The oldest practitioner which I know, and one of the oldest members of the bar which I know in Western Pennsylvania; I know of but one person now occupying that position. And I can not pass over the announcement of this fact, without some reference to the character of the deceased. Having been admitted here as early as 1826—almost fifty-four years ago, he must necessarily have formed some character for good or for evil in this community, as well as in the surrounding counties, where he was well known. And it is but just to his memory to say of the deceased, that no man ever practiced before this bar, who had a more unimpeachable record than the deceased. There are but few men whose whole life for integrity was so unquestioned, so white and pure as Orlo J. Hamlin's. While he bore that high character fully among his professional associates, he was held in the same high estimation by all classes who had intercourse with him. He also had this commendable merit besides: he was a lawyer in the true acceptance of the term, high-minded, conciliatory and honorable, not only in all of his relations with his professional brethren and the bench, but also in his intercourse with all classes of our citizens, who will long remember him with the highest respect for his high character as a good lawyer and citizen. Orlo J. Hamlin was a thorough student, devoted to his books. As a practitioner, there was no member of this bar who came into court more thoroughly prepared, and master of the subject involved in the controversy than the deceased. He was, therefore, always prepared to make an able and learned presentation of his cause. Although Mr. Hamlin for many years had retired from the active labors of his profession, he nevertheless pursued his studies to the last, which seemed to relieve him somewhat from his pain and suffering, during so many years of sickness. Bright and promising as were his prospects in early life, yet they were somewhat clouded by delicate health, which finally settled down for a period of nearly thirty years into a sickness, making him a confirmed invalid during all these dreary years, and confined to his house, seeing but a few persons and conversing with but a few. But still, with all his afflictions, he bore them with Christian fortitude and grace, never forgetting the

profession to which he belonged, never forgetting to hold aloft the high standard of that profession. And so he lived as to make his memory revered, not only in the county of McKean, which ought to be proud of his career, but in the counties surrounding wherever he was known; and wherever his character was known he will be regretted. And while his character may be held up as a model for the profession, it may also be alleged that he had a model character as a good citizen. And that is saying a great deal for the deceased. I have, in view of the character of Mr. Hamlin, and the occasion, drawn a resolution, asking for the appointment of a committee by this court to express the sentiments of this court and bar, in relation to the character of Orlo J. Hamlin, which I will now present to your honor."

Judge Williams said: "Your idea, Mr. Curtis, is that this committee should report at a subsequent sitting of the court upon its action."

Mr. Curtis: "Yes sir; and that the resolutions be filed among the records of the court."

Judge Williams: "Has any other gentleman, at this time, anything to urge upon this subject?"

Mr. Backus: "Your Honor; I have been a member of the McKean county bar some twenty-eight or thirty years. I knew O. J. Hamlin for some time previous to his being confined in consequence of ill health, and his retirement from the bar—probably some two years. I have known of his reputation pretty thoroughly; I have known of the man. Although he has been, as it were, buried for the last twenty-eight years, yet I have learned from the records of this county, from the transactions that have transpired in consequence of his connection with the growth and political existence of this county, sufficient to enable me to know that he was a man of extraordinary character; that he was a man of large ability. He was not only considered one of the first attorneys in Western Pennsylvania, but he was trusted also with the keeping and maintaining of the honors of the State. He was a member of the legislature; he was a member of the constitutional convention of 1838, and of whom it has been said by very able men that there were none more capable, or none who rendered more service in the formation of the constitution, than Orlo J. Hamlin. In the constitutional convention of 1873, one of its most distinguished members, ex-Chief-Justice Woodward, in his address to this body on the proposition to give to each county at least one representative in the lower branch of the legislature, said of the deceased: 'Mr. President, in the convention of 1837, there was a young man by the name of Hamlin, who discussed this subject in such a manner as to wring from Mr. Sergeant, the president of the convention, a very high compliment, and I undertake to say, that from the beginning to the end of the session of that body there was no subject so scientifically and thoroughly discussed as this subject of county representation by that young man. Since this debate has come up in this body, I have referred to the debates of the convention of 1837, and have read his speech, and I wish every gentleman here had done so.' The people who have known him for years have known him as a man of great ability. They have known him as a man of great honesty and integrity; one who was at any and at all times, not only when in full life, but often he was confined to his room, when he was unable to exercise his full powers of thought by reason of suffering and pain, ready to adjust differences and quiet law suits between neighbors, he was one who was looked up to. He was consulted as to the settlement of difficulties arising among neighbors. He was a man who did honors to the profession, who never urged a law suit, but invariably took all trouble and pains possible to make neighbors respect each other as men. Therefore, he has stood high in the

community. All who spoke of him gave him credit as being a man of worth, and a man, who, when he went out of society, was very much missed. His departure will be regretted so long as the old citizens of this county remain on this side of the dark and turbulent river over which Orlo J. Hamlin has triumphantly passed."

Judge Williams said: "It was not our good fortune to have a personal acquaintance with Mr. Hamlin. His active connection with the profession had closed before our connection with the courts of McKean county began. But through all the years of our attendance upon these courts we have heard but one opinion expressed of him. Whether he was spoken of as a citizen or as a lawyer, it has uniformly been in terms of high praise. From those who knew him when in his full strength, and met him in the contests of the court-room, we have gotten the opinion that he was recognized as a lawyer of more than ordinary painstaking, and of more than ordinary attainments; while as an advocate he was earnest, eloquent, and, before a jury who knew his own character, almost irresistible. During the long years of his retirement in a sick room he is reputed to have kept up his acquaintance with the literature of the age, to have been a careful student of the sciences, and indeed to have watched with interest even the recent changes and developments in progress about him. His long and successful professional career, his public services, his high personal character, and his recognized ability make this motion eminently proper, notwithstanding the fact that many years have elapsed since Mr. Hamlin's professional career closed. We entertain it with pleasure, and in compliance with it appoint the following committee, viz.: Hons. C. B. Curtis, A. G. Olmsted, J. C. Backus, W. W. Brown and P. Ford, Esq. And it is further ordered that as a mark of respect for the memory of the deceased these courts do now adjourn, and that this order be entered at length upon the minutes."

The committee appointed by the court to prepare resolutions of the sense of this bar presents the following resolutions, February 18, 1880, in open court:

Resolved, That the Court and Bar of this County sincerely mourn the death of our esteemed deceased brother, O. J. Hamlin, a member of this bar for more than fifty years.

Resolved, That we entertain the profoundest respect for the unsullied character of the deceased as a good citizen and a lawyer of sterling integrity, and of more than ordinary professional learning and ability.

Resolved, That we tender to the family of the deceased our sincerest condolence in their bereavement for their irreparable loss.

And now, February 19, 1880, it is ordered that the resolutions, reported by the committee appointed on the 16th day of February inst., be entered at length upon the minutes of this Court as a part of the proceedings of the day, and that the prothonotary make and deliver to the committee a copy hereof certified under his official seal for presentation to the family of the said O. J. Hamlin, deceased.

The eulogies bestowed on the pioneer lawyer on that 18th day of February, 1880, only five days after he was called to the bar of the Supreme Court of the Universe, were not utterances of fashion or custom. The pioneer more than deserved this praise, for every act of his, during over half a century's residence in McKean county, was one bringing benefits to the community, county or district.

Mr. Hamlin was the father of three children: Henry, John C. and Pauline (wife of Robert King), who all live in Smethport.