

COMMEMORATIVE

BIOGRAPHICAL RECORD

— OF —

CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA,

INCLUDING THE COUNTIES OF

Centre, Clinton, Union and Snyder,

CONTAINING

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF PROMINENT AND REPRESENTATIVE  
CITIZENS, AND OF MANY OF THE EARLY SETTLED FAMILIES.

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~ ILLUSTRATED ~

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CHICAGO:  
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**B** B. HARRIS has served as Collector of Taxes for the Borough of Lewisburg, Union county, ever since the law of 1886 went into force, and his efficiency and ability had been previously tested by a long period in a similar capacity in two of the wards, under the old law. The history of this popular and public-spirited citizen is of unusual interest, his war records of two wars and his experiences in the West in the early days recalling scenes now historic.

A native of Union county, born May 3, 1839, he was taken to Lewisburg in 1850, and there acquired his education in what is now known as Bucknell Academy. In 1854 he went to Freeport, Ill., to find a brother, with whom he remained until the Pike's Peak excitement set in and led him with hosts of others to cross the Plains. Although he paid his passage he drove a wagon load of shoes from Freeport to Omaha, Neb., where the owner traded the shoes for fifteen head of milch cows, which Mr. Harris drove to Denver, riding all the way on an Indian pony

Those were wonderful days, but many failed to realize the ambition which had taken them upon the long and toilsome journey, and Mr. Harris was one of those upon whom fortune failed to smile. He first located on Clear creek at Boulder City, but soon found that the man with whom he had crossed the Plains, and for whom he had endured many hardships, could not furnish him employment, and nothing remained but to return to Denver as best he could. He shouldered his trunk and carried it to a point where he could await a wagon train bound to that city, and on his arrival met a cousin from Freeport, Ill., in whom the gold-hunting fever was at its height. Joining the Rocky Mountain Prospecting Company, Mr. Harris soon became a favorite among them. Retiring from the services of the Rocky Mountain Prospecting Company, he returned to Denver, packing the Snowy Range of the Rocky Mountains alone.

Denver was but little more than a gambler's camp at that time, affording but little choice of occupation to a needy man, and Mr. Harris "roughed it" for a time in a manner truly Bohemian, washing dishes in a restaurant for his meals, and finding his bed where he best could. After a few weeks, however, he was offered the place of head waiter, the former incumbent having been killed in a brawl. The salary of \$50 a month seemed a genuine bonanza. He remained about a year and then joined the army for the Mormon war, participating in the battle at Dead Man's Gulch, the scene of the great massacre. After six months in this service he became a rancher or cowboy, and, taking the Platte fever, he finally turned his face homeward, making the trip to Nebraska City in a wagon. From there Mr. Harris made his way by railroad to Freeport, Ill., where he secured employment and remained until a brother, J. S. Harris, came from California and took him home to Lewisburg. This was in 1860, and Mr. Harris decided after spending some time at home to visit the oil fields on the Allegheny river, which were then creating so much excitement. While at New Pennsylvania on his way by boat to Oil City, papers were put on board which told the story of the attack upon Fort Sumter, and the boat at once turned back to Pittsburg where they found the people wrought up to a high state of feeling. Mr. Harris started on his return home, going by railway to Lewistown, and walking from that point to Harrisburg where he found a brother-in-law (F. P. Green); accompanying him to Bellefonte, he then returned to his home in Lewisburg. He was among the first to enlist for the three-months' service when our Civil war broke

out, and at the end of that time he re-enlisted for three years in Company E, 51st P. V. I., which was assigned to the Ninth Corps of the Burnside expedition. He took part in the battles of Roanoke Island, Newberne, Camden, Cold Harbor, and numerous other engagements; his health not being equal to the strain, he was discharged at Newberne, N. C., June 17, 1862. While on the frontier he was wounded by a Indian arrow and spear in the shoulder and groin.

After his discharge from the United States service he returned home, and as he regained his health refused to remain inactive while the nation's life was imperiled, and, on November 28, 1863, he rejoined the army. But his patriotic ardor was again balked by illness, and he was discharged a second time, February 1, 1864, on surgeon's certificate of disability. Having previously become proficient in dentistry he engaged in that calling in Seymour, Conn., New York City, Philadelphia, Lewistown and Lewisburg, but later gave up the business to follow that of steam-fitting, plumbing and gas-fitting. In 1879 he was appointed tax collector for a portion of the City of Lewisburg, and after the new law was put in force in 1886 he was elected collector for the city. Since that time he has made the work his chief interest, gradually withdrawing from his other business.

On July 4, 1869, Mr. Harris was married to Miss Jennie E. Diefenderfer, who was born in Lewisburg, June 8, 1845, and has always had her home there. Her father, Joel Diefenderfer, a native of White Deer Valley, Union county, was born March 17, 1824, and died June 15, 1846. Her mother, whose maiden name was Elizabeth Dentler, was born December 31, 1824, and is still living, surviving a second husband, the late S. S. Hess. Both families were of high English and high German descendants. On the paternal side Mrs. Harris' grandfather was John Diefenderfer, a native of Bucks county, who spent his last days in Union county. Her maternal grandfather, John Dentler, was born in Philadelphia county, and died in Lewisburg, in 1854, at the age of seventy-four. At one time he was wealthy, but reverses came and in his later years he worked as a laborer.

Mr. and Mrs. Harris have had four children, of whom three are living: William Laird, born May 3, 1870, was educated in the Lewisburg High School, and is now employed in the Maine Eye and Ear Infirmary of Portland, Maine. He married Gertrude Tinsman, and has one living child, Cora Mae; two others, Ralph and Jeanette, died in infancy. (Mrs. W. L. Harris' brother, Wm. H. Tinsman, Jr., was one of the

ill-fated Maine's crew, who lost his life when our battle ship "Maine" was blown up in the harbor of Havana). (2) Harry Elsworth, born March 16, 1873, is in the employ of the Lovel Excel Bicycle Works in Portland, Maine. (3) James S., born January 3, 1875, is a stenographer and typewriter at Lewisburg. (4) Frank G., born October 6, 1884, died on the same day.

In political affiliations Mr. Harris is a Republican. Socially, he is prominent and various fraternal orders in his locality owe much to his active support. He was a charter member of the G. A. R. Post No. 52, of Lewisburg, and his family are identified with the Associated branches, the two eldest sons (one a lieutenant) as members of the society of Sons of Veterans, Portland, Maine, and his wife and daughter-in-law (president) as members of the Ladies' Aid Society and the Woman's Relief Corps. Mr. Harris also belongs to the B. P. O. E.; to the Protected Home Circle, and to the Ancient and Illustrious Order of Knights of Malta, being a charter member of Mount Carmel Commandery No. 22, Mt. Carmel, Penn., and of the College of the Ancients, an affiliated body. He was the organizer of Red Cross Commandery at Lewisburg, founded May 17, 1888, and re-organized February 13, 1891. His eldest son, W. L. Harris, of Portland, Maine, is connected with the A. P. A., and is one of the youngest members of the Order of Knights of Malta, having entered it when but one day over eighteen.

The Harris family is well known in Pennsylvania, and one of its members, John Harris, was the founder of its capital city. Our subject is of the fourth generation in descent from William Harris, who came from Wales and located in Paxton township (then Lancaster county, Penn.). He died there in 1763. His wife, whose maiden name was Kathrin Douglass, was a native of Scotland, and a relative of Sir Robert Douglass. They had six children: James, born January 16, 1739, died 1786; Sarah, born March 20, 1741 (no date of death preserved); John, November 20, 1746 (no date of death preserved); William, November 20, 1749, died in 1763; Mary, July 22, 1752 (no date of death preserved); and Robert, March, 1755. The last named served as surgeon's mate in the Revolutionary army, and the medicine chest that he carried is still in the family. He died March 4, 1785, and is interred in the churchyard attached to the Chester Valley Presbyterian Church, near Berwyn, Chester Co., Pennsylvania.

James Harris, the grandfather of our subject, was a soldier in Washington's forces during the struggle for independence, and took part in the

battle on Brandywine Creek. He was married June 2, 1768, to Miss Mary Laird, born May 10, 1750 (her mother's maiden name was Catharine Spencer, from Scotland), and had ten children, whose names with dates of birth, and death are as follows: William, April 28, 1769, February 2, 1785; Elizabeth, July 18, 1770, May 20, 1842, married Thomas Howard and settled in Buffalo Valley; Catharine, April 2, 1772, December 28, 1784; Jean, January 6, 1774, December 5, 1839, never married, was buried at Lewisburg, as was also Laird, February 22, 1776, June 30, 1704; Robert, November 22, 1777, about 1813; Sarah, September 4, 1779, December 30, 1827; James, June 13, 1781, July 1, 1868; Martha, August 13, 1784, February 13, 1873; William L., May 17, 1786, November 11, 1845.

William L. Harris was a prominent politician, a member of the Legislature, and a member of the convention which assembled at the State Capital in Harrisburg, May 2, 1837, to alter and amend the constitution of the State of Pennsylvania. He died from the effects of a surgical operation. The father of this family died in 1786, his remains being interred in Derry graveyard in Dauphin county. His widow survived him and brought her children to Union county about 1794, locating in (then) Buffalo township, on land which has been in the family ever since. She held the title until 1818, when she deeded it to two of her sons, James (2), our subject's father, and William L., and she continued to reside there until her death, December 13, 1842, from old age. Her remains now rest in the cemetery at Lewisburg. The portion of the farm which she gave to William L. Harris is now owned and occupied by a brother of our subject, William L. Harris (son of James Harris).

James Harris (2), the father of our subject, had not yet attained his majority when he came to Union county, and the greater part of his life was spent there in farming. In his later years he bought property in Lewisburg where he passed away. He was nearly six feet tall, and of slender build, and in disposition he was active, making a success of his own business affairs and taking an influential part in the local movements of his time. In politics he was first a Whig, and later a Republican, and he served ably in various township offices. He and his wife were both devout members of the Presbyterian Church, and were highly esteemed among their associates. They were married October 19, 1819, and Mrs. Harris passed away April 13, 1879. Her maiden name was Sarah Bell, and she was born in Dauphin county on Sweet Arrow creek, in 1794. They had nine children, of whom our subject,

Berryhill B. Harris, is the youngest: (1) William L., born August 24, 1820, is a farmer in East Buffalo township, Union county, and is also engaged in banking. (2) James S., born April 14, 1822, died March 10, 1882, and was buried in Mt. Vernon Cemetery, Philadelphia. He was a physician and spent some time out west, the first cabin at Nevada City, Cal., having been built by him. He married Miss Emma E. Whartenby, October 12, 1852. (3) Samuel B., born September 2, 1824, resided at Freeport, Ill., married Anna E. VanDyke, June 11, 1850, died March 8, 1897, in Beloit, Wis., buried in Freeport, Illinois. (4) Mary L., born November 16, 1826, is the widow of the late S. Wilson Snodgrass, of Mifflinburg. (5) Robert D., born February 18, 1829, died at Granada City, Nicaragua, October, 1856, while serving as a lieutenant in Walker's Expedition. (6) Ann B., born March 24, 1831, resides in Bellefonte. (7) Sarah C., born June 17, 1833, married F. P. Green, of Bellefonte. (8) Caroline D., born January 31, 1836, died September 19, 1864, buried in Lewisburg Cemetery. (9) Berryhill B., born May 3, 1839.

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