

HISTORY

OF

VENANGO COUNTY,

PENNSYLVANIA,

AND INCIDENTALLY OF PETROLEUM,

TOGETHER WITH

ACCOUNTS OF THE EARLY SETTLEMENT AND PROGRESS OF EACH TOWNSHIP,
BOROUGH AND VILLAGE,

WITH

PERSONAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF THE EARLY SETTLERS, REPRESENTATIVE MEN, FAMILY RECORDS, ETC.

BY AN ABLE CORPS OF HISTORIANS.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

DESCRIPTIVE OF ITS SCENERY, PRIVATE RESIDENCES, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, FARM SCENES, OIL DERRICKS, MANUFACTORIES, ETC., FROM ORIGINAL SKETCHES.

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SKETCHES OF EMINENT MILITARY MEN.

“GENERAL ALEXANDER HAYS.*

“Alexander Hays, first Colonel of the Sixty-third Regiment, and Brevet Major-General of Volunteers, was born at Franklin, Venango county, July 8, 1819. He was the son of General Samuel Hays, a native of Ireland, and Agnes (Broadfoot) Hays. After acquiring a primary education in the schools of his native place, he entered Allegheny College, at Meadville; and subsequently, in 1840, was appointed a cadet in the Military Academy at West Point, where he graduated in 1844, and where, for three years, he was a fellow-student of President Grant. He was assigned to duty with the rank of brevet second lieutenant in the Fourth Infantry, to which Grant also belonged, then constituting part of the army of observation stationed in Louisiana.

“His regiment was among the first to advance upon the enemy's territory in the Mexican war, and in the battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma he exhibited undaunted heroism, capturing, in connection with Lieutenant Woods, likewise a Pennsylvanian, the first gun wrested from the enemy. In the latter engagement he was wounded in the leg. He was promoted for gallantry to first lieutenant, and transferred to the Eighth Infantry.

“His wound unfitting him for duty, he was sent on recruiting service to Western Pennsylvania, where he enlisted a company of two hundred men, with whom he rejoined the army at Vera Cruz.

“‘About this time,’ says Colonel Oliphant, in his sketch of Hays, ‘General Joe Lane was ready to start on a more northern line of operations to the city of Mexico. Lieutenant Hays was appointed assistant adjutant-general of the expedition. The young lieutenant was the head and heart and soul of the expedition, materially contributing to the reputation of his commander, which no doubt afterwards sent him to the United States Senate from Oregon.’

“‘His record in the Mexican war,’ says Dr. Paxton, in his funeral discourse, ‘was that of a brave and skillful soldier, whose courage could be trusted in any emergency, and whose ability was equal to his will to dare.’

“A year previous he had married Annie, daughter of John B. McFadden, a prominent citizen of Pittsburgh; and on his return from Mexico, tiring of the dull monotony of army life, he resigned his command and engaged in the manufacture of iron in that city. A stagnation in the business occurred, and the venture was a failure. His West Point education had made him a skillful engineer, and he engaged in railroad engineering, first in California, and subsequently in Western Pennsylvania, where he was engaged in making drafts for an iron bridge when the Rebellion broke out. Without waiting to finish his draft, he laid it aside, saying to his wife, ‘That kind of work is now ended; my country has called, and I must hasten to the field.’ He enlisted in a militia company in Pittsburgh, known as the ‘City Guard,’ of which he was at once chosen captain. This company became part of a regiment raised at Pittsburgh for the three month's service, and he was commissioned major by Governor Curtin.

“Not long before, Floyd, of Virginia, then Secretary of War, had ordered a number of heavy guns from the Allegheny Arsenal, and a large amount of ordnance stores, to some mythical fort near the mouth of the Mississippi river. Major Hays was one of those who resisted their removal, rightly judging of the use they would be put to; and by assuming a bold front and a determined spirit to prevent it, the guns and material were ordered back to the arsenal.

“In the summer of 1861 he was appointed captain in the Sixteenth United States Infantry, but declined the honor; and at the close of the term of service of the Twelfth regiment, he returned home, and at once set about recruiting a regiment for the war. His companions of the ‘City Guard’ followed him, and his regiment was designated the Sixty-third Pennsylvania, of which he was commissioned colonel. After a thorough drill at Camp Wilkins, he led it to the field.

“‘Its history,’ says Colonel Oliphant, ‘is bright with laurels, and red with the blood of its decimated ranks.’ Its commander was the friend, comrade, and fighting colonel of a fighting general—brave old Phil. Kearney. Kearney was so superlatively brave himself, that unless the bearing of another was akin to his own death-defying courage, it failed to attract his notice. Colonel Hays is the only one of his officers that he is known to have complimented for this virtue, except in an official report. After the battle of Fair Oaks, conversing with a group of officers, he referred to the gallant conduct of Colonel Hays. One of the officers ventured the suggestion that he was ‘rash and reckless.’ ‘No, sir! No!’ said Kearney; ‘you are mistaken. Although he storms like a fury on the field, his purpose is clear, and his brain as cool as on drill or parade; and his battle tactics are superb.’

“Colonel Hays was kept upon the front line, facing Richmond, during that sultry month which intervened between Fair Oaks and the Seven Days' battles, and had frequent hot skirmishing with the enemy.

“His regiment was in the battle of Charles City Cross-Roads, and fought splendidly. General Kearney again most heartily complimented him for his gallant and efficient handling of his command. The general, in speaking of the battle, says, ‘It was then that Colonel Hays, with the Sixty-third Pennsylvania, and half of the Thirty-seventh New York, regiments, was moved to the line of the guns. I have here to call to the attention of my superior chiefs this most heroic action on the part of Colonel Hays and his regiment. The Sixty-third has won for Pennsylvania the laurels of fame. That which grape and canister failed in effecting was accomplished by the rapid charge and volleys of this foot. The enemy, at the muzzles of our guns, for the first time retired, fighting stubbornly. Subsequently, ground having been gained, the Sixty-third was ordered to ‘lie low,’ and the battery once more opened its ceaseless work of destruction. This battle saw three renewed onsets, with similar vicissitudes. If there was one man in this attack, there must have been *ten thousand*, and their loss by artillery, although borne with much fortitude, must have been immense.’ General Berry also spoke in terms of the warmest praise of Colonel Hays' gallant and soldierly conduct.

“His next severe encounter was in the second Bull Run battle; Colonel Hays being put into the engagement in the neighborhood of Groveton. He was here badly wounded, his leg being shattered at the ankle, while leading his men in a charge upon the enemy's lines. For his services in this action, and his eminent ability, he was made Brigadier General of volunteers, and Lieutenant-Colonel in the regular army.

“About the 1st of January, 1863, he was assigned to the command of the Third Brigade, Casey's division, Heintzelman's corps, then, and for some time afterwards, in charge of the defenses of Washington. This was the brigade demoralized, surrendered, and disgraced at Harper's Ferry. They needed a general in a double sense. Quaint and grim old Heintzelman knew and picked the man for them. We will see if they got what they wanted, when ‘Sandy Hays’ first drew his sword over them in command. The general devoted his time to a thorough drilling and disciplining of this brigade, and led it into the terrible battle of Gettysburg, from which it emerged with decimated ranks, but crowned with honor. In the final decisive charge, his brigade took from the enemy twenty banners and battle-flags, three thousand stand of arms, and killed and captured above twice the number of his command. Out of twenty mounted orderlies, only six remained. He lost all his colonels. Two horses were shot under him. His whole staff was unhorsed. A correspondent of the *Buffalo Commercial*, himself a soldier, gives a grand and thrilling description of General Hays's part in the battle.

“Upon the presentation of a magnificent sword by the citizens of Pittsburgh, he says, in a letter acknowledging its receipt, ‘When the rebellion broke out upon us like a tornado, in the desecration of our flag at *Sumter*, I took an oath never to sheathe my sword until honorable peace should restore us to one glorious union.’”

“He shared the fortunes of the army in all its weary marching and fighting, till it came upon the intricate mazes of the Wilderness. It was his last battle. On the very day the march

* From *Martial Deeds*.

commenced he had written, 'This morning was beautiful, for

'Lightly and brightly shone the sun,
As if the morn were a jocund one.'

“ ‘Although we were anticipating to march at eight o'clock, it might have been an appropriate harbinger of the day of the regeneration of mankind; but it only brought to remembrance, through the throats of many bugles, that duty enjoined upon each one, perhaps before the setting sun, to lay down a life for his country.’ Longstreet had arrived upon the Union front, and Hancock, having gone beyond the field, had been summoned back, had countermarched, and was advancing in line through the wilds of that labyrinthian ground, when he suddenly came upon the foe. The battle had been raging for half an hour, when General Hays, having ridden along his whole front, and returning, had paused at the head of his old regiment, the Sixty-third, a rifle ball struck him just above the cord of his hat, and, penetrating the brain, he fell without an utterance to the ground. He breathed scarcely three hours, when, without consciousness, he expired. His remains were taken to the rear, and from thence to his home in Pittsburgh. The day of his funeral was a sad one in the great city. Everywhere were the emblems of mourning and the aspects of grief. Five swords were laid upon his coffin, the tokens of respect and confidence of his fellow-citizens. One was the gift of his early associates in his native town of Franklin, as a memorial of his gallantry in Mexico. Another, the free gift of his old companions in arms, the Texas Rangers. A third was presented by his own 'City Guards,' through the lamented Colonel Childs. The fourth, a costly piece of workmanship, was from his fellow-citizens of Pittsburgh. The fifth was his battle-sword, which he grasped in death.

“ ‘He went to his grave having filled a full measure of usefulness. Few had devoted more signal ability to the service of their country.

“ ‘His remains repose in the beautiful Allegheny cemetery, where an appropriate and costly monument has been erected to his memory.

“ ‘So sleep the brave who sink to rest,
By all their country's honors blest.’ ”