

A
BIOGRAPHICAL HISTORY

OF
LANCASTER COUNTY:

BEING A HISTORY OF
EARLY SETTLERS AND EMINENT MEN
OF THE COUNTY;

AS ALSO MUCH OTHER
UNPUBLISHED HISTORICAL INFORMATION, CHIEFLY
OF A LOCAL CHARACTER.

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*HERR, REV. CHRISTIAN, an eminent and successful pastor and teacher in the Mennonite denomination of christians, was born on the 31st day of October, 1780, on the farm on which his son, Rev. Amos Herr, at present resides, situated in what is now West Lampeter township, bordering on Pequea creek. From this circumstance, and for the purpose of distinguishing him from others of the same name, (as the Herr family had then become numerous in that vicinity), his father, whose name was also Christian, either assumed, or had conferred on him by the neighbors the appellation of Pequea Christian Herr; the son assumed the distinctive appendage, and almost uniformly, except in private correspondence, signed his name "Christian Herr, jr., Pequea," until after the death of his father, when the junior was discarded, to be afterwards resumed by his son.

Tradition, which is fast becoming, if it has not already become history, informs us that about the year 1710 or 1711, a colony of emigrants, from Switzerland, effected a settlement on the north side of Pequea creek, which settlement was subsequently included in the limits of Lampeter township. These emigrants were mostly, if not all, members of the Mennonite church. Amongst them was John Herr, or as familiarly expressed in their native language, Hans Herr, as their pastor and leader, who brought with him five sons, who are the progenitors of the numerous and respectable family of that name in the county of Lancaster, many of whom still own and reside on the lands originally purchased from the proprietary government, by their ancestors, more than one hundred and fifty years ago. Christian Herr, the subject of this memoir, was one of the fourth generation from the above named Hans Herr. He had no brother, but six sisters, five of whom were married and one died single. He was brought up as a farmer, and received no education but what was obtained at our common country schools, which at best, in those days, was an imperfect knowledge of reading, writing and common arithmetic. But being of a sprightly disposition, and possessing an inquiring, contemplative turn of mind, and a retentive memory, by reading

and study he improved his intellectual powers, and acquired a general knowledge of men and things superior to most young men of his class and age, which enabled him to aid and advise his neighbors and friends, who frequently consulted him in regard to matters of business. He was often employed in drawing instruments of writing in reference to the disposition of property, by agreement and by devise, and in the settlement of estates, and disputes and controversies amongst neighbors. These acquirements, connected with his kindness of heart and amiable disposition, made him very and deservedly popular amongst his associates and acquaintances. As an evidence of his good standing in the community in which he lived, it may be mentioned that, when yet a young man he was elected, in 1812, one of the commissioners for his native county, the duties of which he discharged with fidelity and ability. Had his ambition prompted him to aspire to worldly distinction he might have attained to higher positions. He was urgently solicited to accept a nomination for the Legislature, but refused. Politics and statesmanship seemed uncongenial to his tastes, and he withdrew from secular employments to exercise his talents and his energies in a higher and nobler field of action.

About the year 1817 he became seriously impressed with the sinfulness of man's natural condition, and the necessity of a Redeemer's grace. On a careful and prayerful perusal and study of the holy scriptures, and the elucidations thereof by learned and enlightened divines, he came to the conclusion that duty required him to connect himself with some religious denomination; and by withdrawing from and declining worldly honors, to enlist himself as an humble follower of his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. After a deliberate examination of the various creeds and professions that came within his knowledge and presented themselves to his mind at the time, none seemed to him more fully in accordance with the teachings of the holy scriptures, which he conceived to be the guide to all truth, than that in which he had been instructed from his childhood, and in which his parents and ancestors had been worthy members and communicants. In accordance with these views and impressions, he and his amiable and excellent wife became members of the Orthodox¹ (or old) Mennonite church. In this situation his meek and exemplary deportment did not escape the notice of his associates, and as an evidence of their confidence in his sincerity, uprightness of conduct and unaffected piety, he was appointed an elder in the congregation with which he worshiped. Pur-

¹This word is used here to distinguish this denomination from those who call themselves the Reformed (or new) Mennonite society.

suings the even tenor of his way in a quiet and unobtrusive manner, attending sedulously to the various duties required of him, frequently visiting the sick and distressed, not only amongst those who belonged to the same congregation, but any who seemed to require his aid and advice, he performed many good offices and received the sincere thanks of many who profited by his disinterested exertions. In adjusting difficulties and reconciling controversies between those who ought to be friends, he was actively engaged, in which his good sense and earnest and impressive manner rendered him very useful; and many hard feelings and vexatious misunderstandings were allayed and assuaged through his intervention, and peace and harmony restored where distrust and suspicion, and in some instances falsehood and malice, had engendered discord and strife.

In the year 1835, as a further appreciation of his merits, he was, according to the rules and ordinances of the church of which he was a member, ordained a minister of the gospel. This opened to him a wider field of action and usefulness, and a corresponding increase of labor and fatigue. He soon obtained the reputation of being a fluent speaker, a sound, logical reasoner, and a fervent, earnest proclaimer of the truths of the gospel. Many who for years had been apathetic or lukewarm on the subject of religion, were awakened to a just sense of their condition, and, as a consequence, a considerable accession was made to the church under his ministration. He could not be called eloquent, attempted no flourishes of rhetoric, indulged in no flights of imagination, but his power lay in the simple, unassuming, but fervent and earnest manner in which he addressed his audience. This, together with the knowledge of his blameless life and unimpeachable character, carried conviction to the hearts of his hearers, when high sounding words, polished, elaborate sentences, delivered in a pompous and ostentatious style of action, would have passed them by as "sounding brass or tinkling cymbals." It now became his duty to preach at least one sermon on every Sabbath day, and not unfrequently he was called on two or three times a week to preach funeral sermons. In addition to those duties he had to give a portion of his time to visit the sick, so that his time was almost constantly occupied in attending to those duties, leaving him very little time in which to attend to private business. In 1831 he had the misfortune to lose his wife, who had for many years been the partner of his joys, and in sickness and sorrow his comforter and supporter. The writer of this article here claims the privilege of a slight digression, to pay a tribute of respect to the memory of one for whom he

entertained the highest regard. He remembers with gratitude the many kindnesses he received at her hands. He knew her well, saw her in many difficult and trying situations, and never knew a lady of more equable temperament and kind and obliging disposition. A loving and confiding wife, she was a constant, unwavering friend, just and generous to her domestics and neighbors, and above all, a sincere and devout christian. She was a daughter of Christian and Barbara Forrer, of Conestoga township.

Some years subsequent to the decease of his wife, his children being nearly all grown up and married, he gave up the management of his fine estate to his sons and took up his residence with his eldest son, Benjamin; and having divested himself as much as possible from all earthly cares, devoted his time entirely to the duties of his calling. In the year 1840 he was elevated to the highest position recognized by the church to which he belonged, that of bishop, successor to Rev. Peter Eby, whose friendship and confidence he shared, and with whom he had traveled many miles in the discharge of the duties incident to their positions. Here again the area and extent of his labors were augmented. It became his duty to frequently visit other and sometimes distant congregations, even beyond the limits of his native county, and occasionally to other States. These labors, with the pressure of advancing age, began to take effect on his, not very robust constitution, and it was noticed by his friends, and must have been felt and observed by himself, that he was beginning to sink under the accumulated pressure of age, infirmity, care and labor; but he conceived it to be his duty to continue in the service of his Lord and Master, and impelled by love to his fellow-men, for whose benefit those labors and inconveniences were exerted and endured, he traveled and preached, exhorted, counseled and advised, as long as he was able to move from place to place. Finally his nervous system became relaxed, and he was scarce able to walk; even his speech was affected by nervous debility, and it was sometimes difficult for him to give utterance to words intended to convey his ideas. Under these circumstances he was compelled to refrain from public speaking, and for several years previous to his decease was unable to leave home; yet he retained the faculties of his mind and conversed, though not without difficulty, with such of his friends as visited him. He endured his affliction with constancy and resignation, his only lament being that he could no longer attend to his duties in the church. His dissolution took place on the 23d day of June, 1853. His funeral was attended by a large number of friends and relatives, as also of

neighbors and acquaintances, who deplored the loss of one so highly gifted, and who had been so eminently useful in his sphere of life. He was emphatically a man of peace. The tenets of his religion were non-resistant, and condemned war as sinful and not to be countenanced, aided or participated in by any of its professors. These likewise prohibited any of its members from engaging in any law-suit before the legal tribunals of the country, but directed all difficulties and controversies that might occur amongst the members of the society, to be referred to and adjusted by the brethren. To the spirit of those principles he gave his full assent, and so deeply was he imbued with the spirit of peace and concord that he deprecated even colloquial controversey, especially on the subject of religion, and avoided it as much as possible. But when duty seemed to require an effort in that direction, he was prompt and decided in maintaining his own views, yet always liberal and courteous to an opponent. Claiming the privilege of acting in accordance with the convictions of his own mind, he willingly allowed to others the same liberty; and, whilst he sustained his own opinions with energy and perspicuity, he never rashly condemned others for entertaining a different opinion.

As a speaker he had a clear, agreeable voice, a good enunciation, and spoke deliberately, so as to be easily understood. His language was suited to the capacity of his audience, being the common idiom of the German population of Lancaster county, sometimes by way of elucidation interspersed with a word or words derived from the English. He was a sententious, forcible and logical speaker, which, with the earnest and feeling manner in which his sermons were delivered, rendered his preaching very effective. His style and manner were persuasive rather than denunciatory; he amplified on the unbounded goodness of God to his finite creatures, endeavored to awaken in their hearts a high sense of gratitude and love to that beneficent being, but failed not to warn them of the danger of persisting in disobedience to His commands.

Having experienced the inconvenience of a defective education, he felt anxious to give his children a better opportunity to improve their minds than had fallen to his lot in his youth. In the year 1815, not being able to get a competent teacher in the neighboring school, he employed a private teacher at his dwelling house for the benefit of his own children and those of some of his nearest neighbors. Subsequently, he succeeded in getting a better teacher in the neighboring school, and for many years took an active part in promoting the cause of education. In the

management of his farm he was industrious, judicious and enterprising. By good judgment, industry, prudence and care, he augmented his paternal inheritance so as to leave a fine estate to his children. He raised a family of six sons, Benjamin, Elias, Christian, Joseph, Amos and Daniel, all of whom are married; and two daughters, Maria, who was intermarried with John Brackbill, and Ann, who was intermarried with John Herr, miller; all of whom reside in the vicinity of where they were born, with the exception of one daughter, Mrs. Brackbill, who is now dead. The sons are all respectable and thrifty farmers, who venerate the memory of their father, and evince a disposition to emulate the virtuous example which he left them; and what was probably most gratifying to him in his old age, his children all became members of the church in which he was so long a pastor and leader. Two of them, Benjamin and Amos, are preachers of the gospel; the former now occupying the position that his father did during the last years of his life, that of bishop in the Mennonite church.

Such was the life and character of a man who in every situation discharged his duty with fidelity. An affectionate husband, a kind and indulgent father, an obliging and agreeable neighbor, a zealous and effective preacher, and a sincere and devout Christian.