

ENCYCLOPÆDIA
OF
CONTEMPORARY BIOGRAPHY,
OF
PENNSYLVANIA.

VOL. 1.

ILLUSTRATED WITH PORTRAITS ON STEEL.

NEW YORK.
ATLANTIC PUBLISHING & ENGRAVING COMPANY.

1889.

EDWIN M. HUKILL.

EDWIN M. HUKILL, a representative citizen and business man of Pittsburgh, and one of the chief pioneers and leading operators in the production of petroleum and natural gas in the State of Pennsylvania, was born in New Castle County, Delaware, February 1, 1840. He was one of the ten children of Gideon E. Hukill and Susanna McMurphy, his wife, and was brought up to farm labor. At the age of sixteen years he lost his father by death. His education, which up to this date had been attended to so far as was possible in the undeveloped state of the schools in that locality, was now, after two terms in the seminary at Pennington, New Jersey, seriously interfered with, for upon him chiefly devolved the care and management of the paternal acres, in consequence of the marriage and removal from home of his elder brother. Without neglecting such opportunities for self-improvement

as leisure and circumstances threw in his way, he devoted himself to the heavy task laid upon him, and for a period of eight years drew from the soil enough to make life comfortable for himself, his widowed mother and his orphaned brothers and sisters. At the age of twenty-four he felt that the time had come, if ever, when he might give up the slow, toilsome and unremunerative life of a farmer, and embark in some calling or business in which there was greater scope for his mental activity and more hope of a fortune requiring earnest and unremitting effort. Having in the spring of 1864 persuaded his mother to accede to this step, he gave up the home farm, and removing his mother and brothers and sisters to the neighboring village of Odessa, he went on to Philadelphia—the great city to which his eyes had been longingly turned for many a day—and here soon found employment in a “clerical capacity.” But this was far from meeting his desires, for he now, more than ever before, realized that a life of action was the one for which he was peculiarly fitted by his temperament and natural inclinations. While casting about for a field into which he might throw his whole energy, both physical and mental, he was attracted by the wonderful accounts from the newly discovered oil wells. With a quick perception he saw that this new field of enterprise held golden opportunities for a person of his physique, character, training and ambition. There was no tarrying until sufficient money could be saved to constitute a capital for operations; but at once, upon making up his mind, he set out for the oil fields. He reached Oil Creek, Venango County, Pa.—where oil was then flowing—early in the month of November, 1864, having in his possession the sum of seven dollars and a half. With the same decision that carried him there, he engaged in work when he arrived. Labor was in great demand, and having been accustomed, from his youth up, to share in the heavy work of his father's farm, he was in no wise loth to take employment as a day-laborer, especially as the pay was good. After a very brief experience in this capacity, he found a position with a corps of surveyors. Whatever money he received he held ready for investment, and so cleverly did he manage his ventures, that within a month after his arrival he had established himself in a small way as a dealer in lumber and oil. By degrees he extended his ventures, and it was not long before he became widely known as one of the most daring and successful operators in the district. His capital now having reached a most respectable figure, he did not delay in concluding to engage in production. The same success attended his efforts in this direction, and “it was not long

before he ranked as one of the most adventurous and successful producers of the entire region, which reputation he has always maintained and does today in all his operations.” In 1871 Mr. Hukill, who had now been married some two years, removed to Oil City and, in association with Messrs. J. B. Reynolds and S. H. Lamberton, established the banking house of Reynolds, Hukill & Co. He remained an active partner in this concern for about five years, and then gave up finance to engage once more in production. The ensuing five years were devoted to prospecting for and producing oil, the last three of them being spent in the McKean or Bradford field. But Mr. Hukill's labors and successes in oil production, have been surpassed by the daring, persistence and magnificence of his achievements in the production of natural gas. The origin of this marvellous product of nature, like that of petroleum, is involved in obscurity. Its utilization, though only in minor ways and to a limited extent, may be said to have begun in the village of Fredonia, N. Y., in the first quarter of the present century. The numerous borings for oil a generation or more later resulted in the discovery of many gas wells, variously situated, and while the product was frequently allowed to go to waste, it was also often utilized for heating and lighting purposes in the towns and sections of country where it was produced. But as gas wells contiguous to oil wells proved subject to the same law of rapid decline and short life as the latter, no attempt was made to “pipe” the product to larger markets. Its employment on a larger scale for manufacturing purposes was first begun by Rogers & Burchfield, at their iron works in Leechburg, Pa., in 1874. In the following year it was similarly employed at Sharpsburg, Pa. Western Pennsylvania is apparently underlaid with reservoirs of natural gas, which has been tapped in paying quantities, principally in the Washington, Murrysville and Grapeville districts. At Murrysville the Haymaker Brothers drilling for oil in November, 1878, struck an enormous gas well which was allowed to waste its production in the air for several years before the permanency of the supply impressed the public. While in the city of Bradford, Pa., in November, 1881, Mr. Hukill discovered in a report of a recent geological survey of Pennsylvania, a chart representing Pittsburgh as the center of a series of anticlinals. His long experience as an oil producer had made him familiar with the theory, held by some, that territory covering anticlinals was more likely to produce gas than oil, and it occurred to him that as gas existed in immense quantities at Murrysville, eighteen miles from Pittsburgh, there was a strong possibility of

its being found nearer the city. He decided to prospect by drilling these anticlinals, and uniting himself with others, he made publication in December following of his intention to apply to Governor Hoyt, on the twenty-first day of January, 1882, for a charter to engage in the business of supplying gas—either artificial or natural—for fuel in the city of Pittsburgh. A copy of this publication, which was the first regularly legal one for such a purpose made, was filed in the office of the Secretary of State. This movement seems to have stimulated some “shrewd manipulators” in Pittsburgh, for on January 22 there appeared in the local papers an announcement that a charter had been granted the day previous to other persons for a similar purpose. The doctrine of exclusive rights under priority of grant having been exploded in the higher courts, this charter proved of no special value. Mr. Hukill’s charter, duly and legally obtained, was never used, and expired by limitation, his associates declining to risk their capital in co-operating with him. Remaining still a firm believer in the superiority of gas as a fuel, he busied himself during the greater part of 1882 in making efforts to induce the iron manufacturers of Pittsburgh to accept the “Strong process” of manufacturing gas for fuel. But in this he found the spirit of opposition to change too great to be overcome. The process had not been sufficiently tested, it was said, and coal was plentiful and reliable. He learned one thing, however, and that was that without exception the manufacturers believed in the economy and utility of natural gas. After this lesson he turned his attention to the development of this product. Removing to Pittsburgh in March, 1883, he began, in conjunction with Professor John F. Carl, of the State geological survey, a series of studies and experiments with a view “to ascertaining the definite location of the anticlinals on either side of the city,” and was doubtless the first to conduct experiments on the anticlinal theory. Although, early in 1883, others, having successfully drilled for gas in the vicinity of Murrysville, had brought it by pipes to the city of Pittsburgh, where it was warmly welcomed, Mr. Hukill continued his scientific experiments in the most thorough manner. Knowing that the limits and bearings of a producing district or belt could only be determined by drilling, “he located three test wells, the first on the Brady’s Bend anticlinal in Shaler township, Allegheny Co., west of the city; the second on the Waynesburg anticlinal, east of the city, on the line of the Pennsylvania Railroad at Carpenter, now Adarra Station, and the third on the same anticlinal, about two miles north of number two well. The first and second wells proved to be—instead of gas

—large water wells in the stratum that should have produced gas, owing to the rapid dip of the rock towards the south, which placed it below the gas horizon, and into the water vein. The third well was far enough north to find the gas strata above the water level, and was a good gasser. This and other wells drilled near it by him fixed the south limit of the now famous Murrysville gas belt. Meanwhile he assumed the probable course of the gas belt yet to be developed, sympathizing with the course of the anticlinal. He located and drilled a well on land leased for the purpose, about ten miles north and thirty degrees east of north from the original Haymaker well (oil and gas belts being generally found to lie in a north-east and south-west direction) which resulted in a good gasser and fixed the north limit of said Murrysville belt, in length about fifteen miles, and at the time of this writing (1888) containing over one hundred wells, supplying gas for Pittsburgh and adjacent markets.” Mr. Hukill’s method of proceeding is the pioneer’s or “wild-catter’s”—so called. Assuming a bearing with an expert’s knowledge, he surveys an air line for a distance across the country, and then leasing land on either side of that line, he follows with the drill. Having in this manner acquired and tested several thousand acres of land in the Murrysville belt, he organized in 1884 the Carpenter Natural Gas Company (of which he was elected President) with a capital of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. The charter of the company was granted in January, the land mentioned was transferred in October, and before the close of the fall a pipe line had been laid from the Murrysville field to Pittsburgh, with a branch to McKeesport. It proved a prosperous and successful enterprise. Mr. Hukill’s connection with it terminated September 1, 1885, when it passed into other hands. Constantly on the alert for “new business,” Mr. Hukill took cognizance of indications and remarks, which, as a general thing, would escape a less observant person. Hearing one of his subordinates in the Carpenter Company allude one day in the early part of 1885 to his pioneer experiences in Greene County, Pa.,—a field which had proved so unsatisfactory as to be abandoned by all operators—he arrived at the conclusion that there was something to be made in that district notwithstanding reports to the contrary; and as the agent of Messrs. E. M. and Geo. P. Hukill and W. H. Shackleton, the speaker referred to (Mr. J. F. Thompson) was delegated to take up land in that section and put down several wells under instructions as to location. A paying well was at length struck, to the surprise of everybody excepting the long-headed promoter of the new exploration, and

the territory was instantly beset by operators. Their science does not seem to have equalled Mr. Hukill's, for in a short time they concluded there was nothing to be made and were re-shipping their machinery to other fields. Buying out the interest of his partners to prevent their incurring any hazard, Mr. Hukill prosecuted experiments with none to molest or interfere. "Up to this time the only oil producing rock in Greene County was known as the Dunkard sand. * * * This stratum lies about seven hundred feet below the surface, varies greatly in thickness and quality of sand, and is very unreliable as an oil producer, so much so that it does not justify operators in drilling it." Following his original method, Mr. Hukill had a line "surveyed south, varying something like thirty degrees west of south, through Greene County, crossing the State line into West Virginia, * * * nominally forty-five miles." Leasing land on either side of this line to the extent of about fifty thousand acres, he drilled several wells, some distance apart, to the depths of from twenty-five hundred to twenty-eight hundred feet, his object being to learn what sand rocks existed and their position, character and possibilities. It was an exceedingly difficult task, attended by innumerable mishaps and delays, and, besides consuming two and a half years' time, occasioned a very heavy expenditure of money. Nobody believed in it and the persistent operator was already an object of sympathy in his fatuous (?) search, when he was rewarded for all his trials and expenditures by finding oil in a lower strata. The most daring operators were astonished by the perseverance and tenacity of Mr. Hukill, the incredulous public were amazed at his success, and science was aided by the solution of "The difficult problem of how many strata of sand rock there are and which one produces oil." This has been termed the most extensive individual enterprise in the long list of oil operations, and its brilliant success has well repaid expense and effort. A more recent enterprise, and one equally successful and profitable, has been in connection with the production and supply of natural gas. In the early part of 1886 he secured several thousand acres of land in Westmoreland County, on the upper portion of the Murrysville gas belt, and organized the Pine Run Gas Company, for the purpose of supplying with fuel-gas the boroughs of Apollo and Leechburgh, on the Kiskiminetas River, and Freeport, on the Allegheny River. The public had so little faith in the undertaking that Mr. Hukill (who was President of the company) and his associates were obliged to purchase nearly all the stock in it. In the places named four large iron works and numerous small manufactories patronized the company,

and more lately the line has been extended so as to include Natrona, on the Allegheny, where the Pennsylvania Salt Manufacturing Company proves a heavy consumer. The stock of the Pine Run Gas Company is thus drawing large dividends. As a consequence of his wide experience in production, covering operations in oil at Oil Creek as early as the pioneer days of 1864, and as recent as the extensive undertaking known far and wide as "Hukill's Greene County scheme," and including also the most scientific development of natural gas that has been made, there is very little Mr. Hukill doesn't know about these two valuable products. He is one of those men—few in number—who master whatever engages their attention, and no difficulties seem great enough to daunt him. Whatever his success has been it is the reward of faithful effort and not accident. He has made the fortune he hoped to make, only it is many times larger than his wildest dreams ever brought to his mind. He inhabits a delightful home in the beautiful suburb of Oakland, and endeavors to make others happy by generous gifts to religious and charitable objects. One who knows him well attests that "the governing law throughout his entire career has been a deep religious principle, a firm belief in an all-wise, directing Providence, to which he ascribes all his success." For one who has spent so much time in such laborious undertakings his habits are noticeably above reproach, as they do not include the use of either liquor or tobacco, to his abstinence from which he attributes in large degree his fine physique, robust health and undiminished activity of mind and body. He excels as an organizer and disciplinarian, and conducts operations on such an extensive scale that he dwells little upon the cost, knowing that success once achieved will remunerate royally. He has been heard to say of himself that "an effort to practice economy in the affairs of every day life seems to dwarf every element of his nature." Both in figure and feature he bears the stamp of a man of exceeding force of will. Mr. Hukill married in 1869, Miss Mattie E. Lyday, a native of Washington County, Md., but at that date a resident of Jasper County, Iowa. To this union four children have been born: Edwin M., Jr., Lyday May, Ralph Vincent, and Grace Watkins, all now living.