

HISTORY  
OF THE  
COUNTY OF WESTMORELAND,  
PENNSYLVANIA,  
WITH  
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES  
OF MANY OF ITS  
PIONEERS AND PROMINENT MEN.

EDITED BY  
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ILLUSTRATED.

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## ALEXANDER JOHNSTON.

The paternal ancestors of Alexander Johnston, Esq., were originally from Annandale, Scotland, where they at one time possessed the estates of Brackenside; but the head of the house, Alexander Johnston, being killed at the battle of Fontenoy, on the 30th of April, 1745, where he was serving as a captain of Welsh Fusiliers in the British service, the estate fell into dispute, and finally, through political strife, was lost, and the family settled in Ireland. There Alexander Johnston was born on the 10th of July, 1773, in County Tyrone, Barony of Omagh, and parish of Killskerry, at a place called Scar Brae, which is two miles from Lowtherstown, five miles from Enniskillen, and near the border of the County Fermanagh, and died at Kingston House, near Youngstown, July 16, 1872, aged ninety-nine years and six days. He emigrated to America in 1797, just one year before the great rebellion of 1798. Departures for America were then rare to what they are at present, and so, owing to this, to personal friendship and the ties of kindred, Mr. Johnston was accompanied on his road for some miles by the members of the Masonic brotherhood, to which he belonged, and also by a company of cavalry, of which he had been a member. He sailed from Londonderry and landed in Philadelphia; from thence he went to Carlisle, Pa., where a cousin, Gen. William Irvine, lived, who, having commanded at Fort Pitt, and knowing Western Pennsylvania, advised him to go to that part of the State. In pursuance of his advice he crossed the Allegheny Mountains to Westmoreland, and after a short time went to Butler County, where he located himself on a tract of pre-emption lands then offered to actual settlers. Becoming dissatisfied he returned to Westmoreland, made the acquaintance of William Freame, a Belfast Irishman, which led to his marriage with Mr. Freame's second daughter, Elizabeth, and located himself in Greensburg.

William Freame had been a private in the British army in 1776, and came to America in the army under Wolfe. At the peace of 1763 between Great Britain and France he accepted, with many of his comrades, the proposition of the English government to remain

in the colonies. He settled first in Lancaster County, where he married Elizabeth Johnston, who had emigrated from Ireland with her father in 1782. This branch of the Johnston family settled in Kentucky and North Carolina.

The issue of the marriage of Alexander Johnston with Elizabeth Freame was eight sons and two daughters. The two eldest sons were educated at West Point, and served as commissioned officers in the regular army. The youngest, Richard, was a volunteer in the Mexican war. Before its close he was appointed a lieutenant in the regular army, and was killed at the head of his company, while storming the enemy's works at Molino del Rey. Hon. Edward Johnston resides in Iowa. The remaining sons living are residents of this State and county. The biographies of two of them, Hon. William F. Johnston and Col. John W. Johnston, will be found elsewhere in this work. The physical stature of the sons was remarkable, varying in height from six feet to six feet six inches, and in weight from two hundred to two hundred and fifty pounds.

After residing a number of years in Greensburg he removed to Pittsburgh and engaged in the mercantile business. In this he was prosperous, but tempted by the high price of iron, owing to the prospect of war and its actual effects, he bought up a large tract of mountainous land in Unity, Derry, and Ligonier townships, Westmoreland Co., erected a forge and rolling-mill, removed to Kingston, and became an ironmaster. His iron-works were called "Kingston," because the name of the tract of land on which they were located had been so designated in the patent. The enterprise did not succeed. Kingston iron was not estimated at full price in the market. Iron fell in price, and Mr. Johnston became not only disheartened at the result but involved in pecuniary affairs. The turnpike road being located alongside of his mansion house, he rented his works and converted his house into a tavern.

After some years he returned to Greensburg, and acted as justice of the peace until his appointment as register and recorder by Governor Wolf. Mr. Johnston had, indeed, been quite an active politician. He acted with the Federal party till its final dissolution, voting for Andrew Gregg, the last Federal candidate in Pennsylvania. He became a Jackson man in 1824, and acted and voted with the Democrats against the anti-Masons and National Republicans. He held several offices,—sheriff by election, justice of the peace, treasurer, and register and recorder by appointment. The dates of his commissions for these respective offices are as follows: sheriff, Nov. 4, 1807; justice of the peace, Oct. 24, 1822; treasurer, Dec. 27, 1826–27; register, etc., Jan. 21, 1830. In the latter office he served for six years, when he returned to his mountain home, Kingston, a place peculiarly adapted to retirement, and where he resided until his death.

He is said to have been at his death the oldest

living Mason in the United States. As one of that fraternity he was admitted in Ireland; walked in a Masonic procession as early as 1795, on the festival of St. John the Baptist. He organized, under special authority from the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, the lodge at Greensburg, and also, by deputation, the lodge at Somerset.

Having been honored by his fellow-citizens with offices of honor and profit, he never transcended his trust or stopped short in his line of duty. Having their confidence, he was always foremost in anything projected for their welfare and the advancement of common interests. In his business connections he was exact to the cent, and of all his many employes not one, perhaps, can say but that he got his due. His own comfortable fireplace felt better as he knew that those connected with him were likewise from want. Occupying public positions as he did, and having many depending upon him as he had through such a long life, he exercised great influence, and certainly great influence for good. His manners were most affable. It mattered not whether to rich or poor, woman or child, he had to all an agreeable way; not stiff and dignified, but urbane and unassuming. Neither did infirmity or any untoward cause make a change in his demeanor. His disposition was social, and, especially in his latter days, nothing pleased him so much as agreeable company. It is natural of old age to seek rest, Nestor-like, in the bosom of their family, or in communing with people of their own years, but he took great pleasure in converse with the young, an evidence of the vigor of his mind, and always to their advantage, for he had encouragement and advice through which one might see high moral principle, patriarchal patriotism, and the wise experience of three generations of men. Thus, courteous in his manners, benevolent in his acts, charitable to the poor, Christian in his walk, he wore with venerable simplicity the dignity of "spotless gentleman,"—a dignity that needs no robe of office to make it honorable.

His memory was stored with personal anecdotes, and replete with historical reminiscences, drawn in part from reading, and in part from personal recollections. He took great pleasure in conversing on these subjects, and having been a close observer, his mind was a microcosm of the greatest historical century in the annals of time. He remembered the ringing of the bells and the shouts and the bonfires by which the people in Ireland rejoiced when they heard the news of the signing of the treaty of peace at Versailles and the termination of the Revolutionary war. Speaking to the writer of this notice, he said he distinctly recollected hearing the watchmen of their native town call out the hour of the night and the surrender of Cornwallis to Washington at Yorktown, which was joyful news, as many Irishmen were on both sides. And this was after the surrender of the empire at Sedan. So great was his age that

he could have heard the first click of the musket on that spring morning at Lexington that startled the world, and after deluging it in blood ceased not to reverberate till the sinister sun went down on that June evening on the shattered columns of the Imperial Guard at Waterloo, an epoch that will always fill a page in the history of the world. When the Corsican Napoleon died he was entering vigorous manhood.

The most casual observer could see as a predominant trait in his character a strong love for his adopted country and its institutions, and although he warmed with native patriotism in recalling the dead—Emmett, Grattan, Burke—men cotemporary with himself, yet Ireland was not to him as America. For the one he grieved; in the other was his most ardent expectation. He was truly American. When he set his foot in America he shook off the rust and moth of prejudice and felt himself a free man.

The evening of his life was such as old age might ever wish for. He possessed all his faculties unimpaired, and physical decline came slowly as he neared his rounding century. All his children, and many of his grandchildren, stood around his death-bed. Death itself stole gradually over his limbs till, on the evening of the 16th of July, as the day went out the light went out, and with the closing shadows the spirit of the patriarch walked into the shades among his fathers.

"Of no distemper, of no blast he died,  
But, fell like autumn fruit that mellowed long,  
Even wondered at because he dropt no sooner.  
Fate seemed to wind him up for fourscore years,  
Yet freshly ran he twenty winters more,  
Till, like a clock worn out with eating time,  
The wheels of weary life at last stood still."

#### WILLIAM FREAME JOHNSTON,

William Freame Johnston, the third Governor of Pennsylvania under the constitution of 1838, from July 9, 1848, to Jan. 20, 1853, was born at Greensburg, Westmoreland Co., on the 29th of November, 1808. He was the son of Alexander Johnston, Esq., of Kingston House, Unity township, and of his wife, Elizabeth Freame, and an account of his ancestry will be found in the sketch of Alexander Johnston, which has just been given. The subject of this sketch was in early boyhood taught by a kind and good mother that the cardinal duties were to obey God's commands, to honor parents, and to love native country. His common school and academic education was limited, but he had from youth an ardent taste for reading, and being blessed with vigorous powers of mind and body, he was enabled by great diligence to acquire a vast fund of information, which served him instead of elaborate training. He studied law under Maj. John B. Alexander, and was admitted to the bar in May, 1829, in his twenty-first year. Shortly afterwards he removed to Armstrong County, where he engaged in the practice of law, soon rising to a position of commanding influence. He was appointed

by Attorney-General Samuel Douglass, and subsequently by Attorney-General Lewis, district attorney for Armstrong County, which office he held until the expiration of Governor Wolf's first term. For several years he represented the county in the Lower House of the Legislature, and in 1847 was elected a member of the Senate from the district composed of the counties of Armstrong, Indiana, Cambria, and Clearfield.

As a legislator, Mr. Johnston was bold and original, not beholden to precedents, and was an acknowledged leader. During the financial crisis which arose during the Presidency of Martin Van Buren many expedients were adopted and many plans proposed to alleviate the wide-spread effects of that disaster. Then Mr. Johnston came forward with a proposition to issue relief notes, for the payment or refunding of which the State pledged its faith. This he advocated with his usual energy and logical acuteness, and though a majority of the Legislature was politically opposed to him, it was adopted and gave instant relief. It was designed as a temporary expedient, and as such was remarkably successful. As the originator of this measure and its special advocate, he acquired a reputation for financial skill and ability throughout the Commonwealth, its fortunate result serving only the more widely to circulate his fame.

In 1847, Mr. Johnston was elected president of the Senate. By a provision of the constitution, if any vacancy occurred by death or otherwise in the office of Governor, the Speaker of the Senate should become the acting executive officer. Governor Shunk, in the extremity of an incurable disease, resigned his office on the last day possible to allow of a new choice at the ensuing fall election, and that day was Sunday. From this complication of affairs arose questions of great constitutional importance. It appeared to be a good opinion that the Speaker of the Senate could hold the office of acting Governor until the election of the next year, but not wishing to hold the office one moment longer than the popular will seemed to dictate, he determined to avoid every occasion of a charge of selfishness and ordered the immediate election. The election thus ordered resulted in the choice of Mr. Johnston for the full term of three years.

He early and persistently, as Governor, took an active and very material interest in the development of the mining and manufacturing interests of the State, and his messages evince the solicitude he had for the public prosperity, and are standing memorials of his practical business and financial views. In all things he was jealous of the honor and renown of the Commonwealth, but he was particularly solicitous for the safety of the records of the Colonial and State government, which until his time existed only in manuscript. In his message of 1851 he recommended that those records worth preservation should be arranged, edited, and printed at the expense of the State. In

compliance with this recommendation, an act was passed authorizing the appointment of a suitable agent to select and superintend their publication. Mr. Samuel Hazard, a gentleman of taste and ability well suited to the execution of the trust, was delegated, and under his supervision twenty-eight volumes of "Colonial Records" and "Pennsylvania Archives," containing a vast amount of original papers of incalculable value and interest, were published.

Governor Johnston deserved much credit for the successful manner in which he managed the financial affairs of the State during his administration. Upon his accession the debt was over forty millions, having been increased eighteen millions during the preceding nine years. The interest on this vast sum was regularly paid.

His political course during his first term had been so satisfactory to the party by whom he was supported that he received the nomination for re-election, but was defeated by a small majority. Upon retiring from office he entered upon an active business life, and was engaged at different periods in the manufacture of iron, boring for salt, the production of oil from bituminous shales, and latterly in refining petroleum. Under his presidency the Allegheny Valley Railroad was constructed from Pittsburgh to the town of Kittanning. During the civil war he took an active part in organizing troops, and, as chairman of the Executive Committee of Public Safety, superintended the construction of the defenses at Pittsburgh. In connection with Mr. John Harper, he became responsible for the ammunition which was sent to West Virginia at a critical juncture in the fortunes of that State, and which materially aided in preserving it from being overrun by the Confederates. He was appointed by President Andrew Johnson collector of the port of Philadelphia, the duties of which office he for several months discharged, but through the hostility of a majority of the Senate to the President he was rejected by that body, though ample testimony was given that the office was faithfully and impartially administered.

He was married on the 12th of April, 1832, to Miss Mary Monteith. The offspring of this marriage were five sons and two daughters.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> We have drawn largely in this sketch from the very valuable and interesting "Lives of the Governors of Pennsylvania," etc., by William C. Armor, Philadelphia, 1872.