

COMMEMORATIVE

BIOGRAPHICAL RECORD

—OF—

WASHINGTON COUNTY,
PENNSYLVANIA,

CONTAINING

Biographical Sketches of Prominent and Representative
Citizens, and of many of the Early
Settled Families.

ILLUSTRATED



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JAMES S. McNARY. Of the McNary family in Washington, the first (of whom there is any record) was James, by trade a shoemaker, who was born in Scotland about the year 1711, and, according to tradition, moved with his family to the North of Ireland. After sojourning there for a time he and his wife emigrated to America, bringing with them their four sons and one daughter, some of whom had married in Ireland.

In the year 1760 (as records show) James McNary bought a tract of land in York county, Penn., in which county he remained for a number of years. He was made an elder (as was also his son John) in the Seceder Congregation of Guinston, one of the oldest congregations of that denomination in America. His sons were: John, James, Thomas and David; his daughter, Jane, married William Robison, and remained for life in York county. The son John came to Washington county in 1801, and bought the tract of land in North Strabane township on which James S. now lives, revisited York county in the fall, expecting to return with his family in the following spring, but died during the winter. All the other sons of James McNary also came to Washington county, Thomas buying land in North Strabane township; James in Chartiers township, and David in Hanover township. Their father came also, and lived, up to the time of his death, with his son, David,

dying in 1796 at the age of eighty-five years; he was buried in the Seceder churchyard near Paris, Washington county.

John McNary, son of the honored old Scotch pioneer, James, and grandfather of James S., died as already stated in York county, after a visit to and a purchase of land in Washington county. His family consisted of wife (Esther Bogle, a native of Ireland), daughters: Elizabeth (wife of William Douglas), Jane (wife of Robert McKibben), Mary (wife of John McCoy), Margaret (wife of James Martin), Esther (wife of Thomas Ewing, and grandmother of Judge Ewing, of Pittsburgh), Agnes (wife of William Pollock) and Jennet (wife of James Marshall); and sons: James, Malcolm, John (father of James S.), Thomas and Alexander.

John McNary, father of subject, in company with his brother Alexander, came into possession of the tract of land their father had bought in Washington county, and removed to it from York county in 1802. John returned to York county and settled up his father's estate there before locating permanently in Washington county. The other brothers, James and Thomas, and all the sisters, with their husbands, came to Washington county except Elizabeth Douglas, who raised her family in York county. Jennet Marshall subsequently went to, and raised a family near, Mansfield, Ohio. After John had closed up his father's estate, he came to his farm, and soon after married Jane Hill, who had but recently come from Dauphin county with her sister, Mrs. James Thome, who had settled on a neighboring farm. After their marriage, which occurred on New Year's Day, 1805, he settled, in company with his brother Alexander, on the farm bought by his father, the same on which his son James S. now lives. This farm had been patented by James Gott, in 1784, sold by him to Samuel Smith, and by Smith to John McNary. In a short time Alexander sold his interest in the farm to John, and moved to and became permanently settled in Jefferson county, Ohio.

The family of John and Jane (Hill) McNary were: sons—William H., John, James S., Oliver R. and Alexander C.; daughters—Esther, Jane E. and Abba Caroline, with the following record: William H. [for his record see biography of J. C. McNary]. John lived unmarried on the old farm, and died April 15, 1881. James S. is the subject of this sketch. Esther married Samuel Pollock, and their family consisted of Jennie, James, John, Samuel (who died in youth), Oliver and Clark; Esther died November 9, 1890. Jane E. lived all her life unmarried at the old home, and died October 26, 1883. Oliver married Ellen Grove, and their family were: Tillie, married to Rev. W. C. Williamson, D. D., now pastor of the U. P. Congregation at Keokuk, Iowa; Ella, married to R. L. Munce, Esq., of Washington county, Penn.; Net-

tie; Hettie; James (deceased) and Clarkson, who is surgeon in the Military National Home at Leavenworth, Kans. (Oliver McNary was major in the army during the Rebellion, and a prisoner of war in the prison pens of Charleston and other places, suffering great privation and cruelty, but survived to get home, and is now living in Leavenworth, Kans.). Alexander C. McNary married Maude Burkhardt, and their children were: daughters—Lorena, Ida, Maude and Grace; sons—Eugene, John and Clarence. Alexander McNary died October 18, 1886. Abba Caroline, the youngest child of John and Jane McNary, died unmarried at the age of nineteen years.

Before leaving the biography of John and Jane McNary we will refer briefly to their early farm life, as it contrasts strongly with that of the present day, and serves to illustrate the noble character of those early pioneers. They were 200 miles from where supplies—such as iron, salt, spices or clothing—could be bought, and such of these things as they did get they carried on horseback over a roadless mountain country. They would slaughter their meat, freeze it, do up the fall work, and start east for salt and other necessaries which the farm would not produce. Their clothing was all made by hand at home. From a few native sheep the wool was shorn, then washed, picked, carded, spun and woven, all in their little cabin home. The flax for their linen was grown on the farm, pulled, spread out to bleach, then broken in a flax "break," scutched, spun and woven, all by hand—tools of the most primitive character. In some parts of this work neighbors would join in a "frolic," and in this consisted the amusements of those days. A "fulling frolic" was an event that might be of interest briefly to describe. The neighbors would all be invited for a certain evening, a room having the closest-laid floor would be selected, then a number of chairs would be placed in a circle around the room and tied together. The young men, in their bare feet, and with their pants rolled up to the knees, would occupy the chairs; the web of linsay, or blankets, would be placed on the floor within the circle, and the "machine" was then ready to be set going. The ladies warmed and applied the soapsuds, and the boys would kick the fabric backward and forward until it was pronounced properly full. If the kicking should at any time lag, and it was thought necessary to make it more lively, it was only necessary to raise the temperature of the soapsuds a few degrees above standard heat. Such was a primitive fulling mill. The grain was all taken to a mill on horseback, and ground in a horse-mill, the mill being operated by a tramp-wheel, on which was put the horse that carried the grain to mill. The most primitive of all was what was known as the "sweep" mill, but that gave way in course of time to the less cumbersome "tramp"-

wheel process. The tramp-wheel was about twenty-five feet in diameter, standing at an angle, the horse's weight on one side causing it to revolve, the horse walking as the wheel passed from under him. These mills had patrons living ten or more miles away, who had to travel that distance, then wait their turn at the mill, do their own grinding and get home, perhaps, the second day afterward. The tools used for farming purposes were principally made by the farmers themselves, even harness for their horses were manufactured out of the bark of trees, or hickory withes. Only the point and shear of the plows were made of iron; wooden mouldboards were made from split, twisty oak; shovels, forks, harrows, threshes—all of wood; latches, hinges and nails (used for building)—all made by hand. Such was farm life when young James S., the subject of this sketch, was a boy. But with all these difficulties in their way in providing for bodily comfort, they did not forget the better part—the mind and soul. John McNary was active in establishing schools for the children, and church privileges for all. One of the early members of Chartiers Seceder Church, situated five miles distant, he and his family were constant attendants, riding horseback or walking, and often sitting in the church through long winter days with no fire, and walls not built close enough to keep out the winter blasts—manifesting a love of God and for His house, and a devotion to the principles of their holy religion that the church members of these favored days would do well to emulate. He was early elected an elder, and served with honor through life.

Mr. McNary lived to improve his farm; build one of the first brick farm mansions in the vicinity; establish one of the first Merino flocks of sheep, the sheep that made Washington famous as the first and best fine-wool producing county in America; lived to see his family grow up in honor around him, and died February 11, 1844. Jane, his wife, survived him many years as the honored head of the family. Being a woman of more than ordinary physical and mental development, she deserves special mention for her many excellent qualities. In the early struggles for the support of her family she did her part. After the breakfast dishes were set aside she would carry her infant (James S.) to the field, lay him in the fence corner, and take her place with the reapers, keeping her land up with the best of them until the noon hour, when she would repair to the house and bring out the meal to the field, where dinner was generally eaten, then nurse her babe, set the dishes aside, and take up her sickle again. And this was not one day's experience, but for days and even years. Her disposition was ever happy and cheerful. A beautiful singer, she would fill her home with good cheer and hospitality, and even to old age Grandmother

McNary seemed supremely cheerful, happy and kind, enjoying with a relish the fun and enjoyment of children and grandchildren, who often and gladly assembled to enjoy the loving hospitality and tender, affectionate greeting ever sure to be enjoyed at her home. She died January 11, 1867, at the good old age of eighty-seven years.

Before leaving this old home, which was a type of many others in those primitive times, whose lot would seem to be so hard and almost void of comfort, we would record that in the midst of all there was a happiness and enjoyment, a real pleasure in their busy lives, of which the rich and idle in homes of luxury never know. No jealousies were there to rankle, no envy to corrode; no idle hours to drag their weary blighting miasma over the life—their very cares were their comforts, and life was a blessing because it was filled to the brim with doing good and enjoying it.

The above record gives some idea of the scenes and circumstances surrounding the subject of this sketch in his early life; and of the mother that nurtured and trained him—all favorable to the development of a vigorous, healthy, mental, moral and physical; and such was the nature of James S. McNary. In strength of character, integrity of purpose, industry, hospitality and vigor of body and mind, his "make up," so to speak, was of a nature to prove the value of early training and good influence. Had he chosen a public profession, he would have taken a front rank, and become the leader of thought and progress among men; but he chose—partly from the need of his services at home, and partly from native taste, being rather of a retiring disposition—the life of a farmer, a calling as honorable as that of the legislator, scientist, or military hero, but one that does not usually share with them in public applause. His renown is in richer fields and finer flocks. His benefactions are the making of two blades of grass grow where but one grew before.

In person Mr. McNary was in his younger days tall and muscular; in disposition cheerful and happy. In vigor of constitution he had few equals; in judgment, calm, cautious, but in the end decided, the wisdom of his council was sought far and wide. In industry and perseverance he was proverbial. He never surrendered to difficulties nor was faint-hearted when trials came. A little incident illustrative of his character in this regard might be admissible here. One day, when he was eighty years old, he was standing in the hind end of his wagon, when the horse, by a quick movement forward, threw him out backward, on the hard street, his head striking on a stone, which cut a gash on the side of his head, rendering him insensible for the time. He was assisted into an office near by, and a couch made for him to lie on while his wound was being sewed up. When all

was ready he was told to lie down, but in reply he simply told him to go "on with their sewing." "No," said the others, "lie down on the lounge." "No." Still they insisted until, becoming quite impatient, he said: "go on with your sewing, I ain't the lying kind." And truly it may be said of him that in all his long life he was not one of the lying kind. "Doing everything right" was his motto; doing it the easy way and doing it right was his ingenuity. And being of more than ordinary strength of body and muscle, coupled with a thoughtful and ingenious mind, he could accomplish more in a day in advancing farm work than was usual among men. When it came to doing hard work on the farm he acknowledged no superior, if any equal. When he was in the prime of manhood the grain was cut with the cradle; the grass cut with the scythe; hay pitched with a fork, in each case bodily strength and muscle being necessary to the utmost limit, and for that very reason he seemed to delight in doing them and doing more than anybody else could. Mr. McNary was married on the second Tuesday of October, 1841, to Rachel Anderson, who with an infant son died August 3, 1842, and they were buried in the same grave. He never again married. He lived for many years on his "Rich Hill" farm in South Strabane township, until he purchased the old John McNary homestead where he has since lived. He delights in keeping his friends about him, and when any one of them seems to need a home, his is open to them. If he did not raise a family of his own, he helped to raise those of others, with a father's devotion and care. Early in life he joined Chartiers U. P. Church, and has been a member of same all his life, and if the record were known he has perhaps spent as many days upon the public ministry in that congregation as any member in it, besides contributing as much to its support. He on one occasion, as a member of the board of trustees, while discussing the question of raising and paying the pastor's salary, objected to the practice then almost universal of paying when they might have the money, saying to the board: "Pay it when it is due; if you have not got the money in the treasury, come to me and get it." And true to his promise, he made up what was necessary and not in the treasury, on the day of each quarter out of his own pocket when due, the result being that the old congregation for almost the first time paid the salary promptly when due, until the habit of doing so became formed, and is practiced faithfully (to its honor be it said) to the present day.

In politics Mr. McNary was originally an Anti-slavery Whig; was on the ground floor in the Republican party; rejoiced in the downfall of American slavery, and the overthrow of the Rebellion. He has always been a consistent temperance man,

and an earnest advocate of all moral reforms. He was one of the incorporators of the Oak Spring Cemetery Company, and helped by his counsel to convert the old planless, neglected, burying place into one of the neatest, most artistic and worthy memorial grounds in the county. He was a stockholder in the Canonsburg National Bank, also of the Citizens Bank (limited), in that borough, and of the Western Pennsylvania Agricultural Association, thereby showing his public spirit and interest in all the movements tending to promote and develop the resources of the county. He was one of the organizing members of the National Delaine Sheep Breeders Association, and now owns one of the best bred flocks of Delaine sheep in the United States, never having been beaten in any fair for the best Delaine wool. And now in his hospitable home, at the age of eighty-three years, he is living with an active interest in the welfare of friends and church and country, and awaiting the reward promised the faithful in the world to come.

J C. McNARY, Canonsburg. W. H. McNary, the eldest son of John McNary, of North Strabane township, was born November 26, 1805. He received his education in a log schoolhouse under the tuition of "old Master Howe" (as he was called), who taught for twenty-five consecutive years in the same place, and he was the only teacher William had. But, being a devoted reader, and, withal, an apt scholar, he secured an education that enabled him to take his place among his fellow-men as a leader of thought, always able to give a reason for the faith he professed in an intelligent and easy manner.

On February 26, 1828, he married Margaret Murray, by which union there were twelve children, of whom the following is a brief record: Mary died at the age of four years. John C. is the subject of this sketch. Martha Jane married Robert Russel, Esq., of Chartiers township, who was a leading farmer, a progressive stock breeder, and an elder in Chartiers U. P. Church, and is now deceased. George died at the age of five years. Margaretta died when twenty-one years old. James W. married Hettie Williamson, a minister in the Presbyterian Church, and they settled at Milwaukee, Wis.; they have three children: Nellie, Willie and Foster. William T. married Elizabeth Graham; their children: Lida, Willie, Nora, Graham, Margaretta, George and John; he is a minister in the United Presbyterian Church, and settled at Tarkio, Mo.; had the degree of D. D. conferred on him, and is president of the board of trustees of Tarkio College; was also a colonel in the army during the Civil war. Anna Maria married Rev. E. G. McKinley, a Presbyterian minister, and they settled

at Bartow, Fla.; their children: Russel, Gretta and Louise. Thomas M. lives with his Uncle James in North Strabane township. Oliver died at the age of twelve years. Carrie (twin of Emma) married Rev. J. Buff Jackson, a minister in the United Presbyterian Church, and they settled at Morning Sun, Iowa; their children: Bessie, William, Retta, John, Russel (twin, deceased in infancy), Reed (twin) and Martha. Emma (twin of Carrie) died at sixteen years of age. These are the children and grandchildren of W. H. McNary.

After the marriage of William they lived for three years on the farm known as the "Rich Hill farm," in South Strabane township; then purchased and moved to the McNary homestead, known as the "Fine View farm," in Chartiers township. He was an industrious, devoted farmer, and made the breeding of fine Merino sheep a specialty in his farming operations, in which he was successful in having one of the best flocks in the county. He was a very zealous friend of education, and spared neither labor nor expense in securing for his family the best of school privileges. He was for thirty years an elder in Chartiers Seceder (later the United Presbyterian) Church, a leader in church work, and was often chosen to represent the congregation in the higher courts of the church. He was conspicuous as one of the original anti slavery men of the country. He believed slavery to be a crime against God and man alike, and an injury to master and slave as well—a disgrace to our fair nation, and a blight and injury to the county and State where it existed. He was very bold and fearless, even at the risk of bodily harm, in denouncing and opposing it in those dark times, when slavery was defended in Congress by the bludgeon, and the slave hunter in northern States by Federal law. He sheltered and assisted the runaway, when to do so meant fine and imprisonment by the laws of the country. He was present and active at the meeting in Pittsburgh where the Republican party was born, and lived to see the triumph of the principles he so long defended in the overthrow of slavery and the enfranchisement of the colored race. He was also an earnest advocate of temperance; was one of the first farmers, where he lived, to oppose and abandon the practice of the constant use of liquor in the harvest fields and gathering of neighbors for the assistance of one another. On questions of right and wrong he was fearless and uncompromising—he would denounce evil and evil-doers with a severity which perhaps at times would do no good, but rather made him enemies at the time. Yet, withal, he was one of the kindest of men; no appeal for help from the needy was ever unheeded, nor any sent hungry away from his door, his house being proverbial for its hospitality to neighbor, friend or stranger alike. In 1861 he left the farm, moving to Canonsburg, and there—

busy as ever with his lots and houses—his pastime and pleasure was to be doing something. He could not be idle; never was known to sit and while away the time aimlessly. Although reading was part of his industry, one seldom saw him without book or paper in his hand when at rest in his home. He died September 10, 1877, more honored in his death than in his life by all who knew him for his many sterling qualities of head and heart. His wife Margaret survived him but a few years. She was a lovely woman, beloved by everybody; of a meek and quiet spirit, a striking contrast to the restless energy of her husband, and yet seeming to honor him the more for what she termed his "fuss and energy."

John C. McNary, the subject proper of this sketch, the oldest son of William and Margaret McNary, was born on the Rich Hill farm in South Strabane township, July 30, 1830. He passed all his early life on the farm with his father in Chartiers township, to which the latter moved in 1832. His privilege was to attend one of the best common schools of the county, which became so through the energy and love of education of his father, and a few other worthy patrons whom we would take a pleasure in naming: They were John Hays, John Haft, Samuel Griffith, George Barnet and others, who from time to time came into the district. On October 20, 1859, J. C. McNary was married to Mary Jane Rankin, of Mercersburg, Penn., who died June 28, 1866, aged thirty-seven years. Her six children (there being two pairs of twins among them) all died in infancy. Mr. McNary afterward married, May 20, 1868, Abba T. Pollock, and their children were Mary Ellen, Mattie J. R., James T., William Houston, John Thome, and Nannie Jennett. Of these, Mary Ellen married George Paxton, January 20, 1892, and settled on a farm near Houstonville, in Chartiers township; Mattie J. R. died September 20, 1892, of typhoid fever, at her father's home in Canonsburg, at the age of twenty-one years; James T. died March 30, 1880, of inflammatory rheumatism; William H., John T. and Nannie J. are all at home with their parents, and attending school. Our subject early united with the U. P. Church of Chartiers, of which he was elected an elder. On the organization of a congregation in Houstonville, he became a member there, as he felt it his duty to take his place where he was most needed. He remained to see the young congregation well established; and when he moved to Canonsburg (in 1892) he again united with old Chartiers, the church of his father. Politically, Mr. McNary is an anti-saloon Republican—an ardent Protectionist—and as these two great principles are not embodied in any one party just at the present day, he is not a very ardent party man, but hopes for the day when, like the revolution of 1856, good

men all over the country will again unite, independent of old party trammel, in defense of all true reform. Before the war he was a brigadier-general in the State Guards, and at times is called "General." For twenty consecutive years, while in the township, he was justice of the peace, and is on that account also familiarly called "squire." He has been entrusted with the settlement of very many estates, and always took an active part in all local improvements. He is one of the incorporators of Oak Spring Cemetery Co., and of Western Penn. Agricultural Association. He was one of the original breeders of the National Delaine sheep, and the first man to ever adopt and advertise a flock with the title, "The Delaine Merino." He is president of the Citizens Bank (limited), Cansonsburg, in which borough he is now living, for the purpose of securing better school privileges for his family, and to be near his other business interests, as well as to escape the care and labor of farm life, believing that when all the rest do as much hard work as he has, it will be all done; and also to be near to enjoy the religious privileges of God's house, and attend all the meetings for prayer and religious conference, believing them to be our richest inheritance in this famed land.

[For the ancestry of W. H. McNary, father of J. C., see biography of James S. McNary.