

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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## EARLY SETTLERS, ADVENTURES, AND HARDSHIPS.

It is probable, but not certainly provable, that settlements were made in Derry township shortly after the formation of the old military or Forbes' road (1758), that is to say, some who have examined into the early annals of the settlement place some of the settlements so early as 1762, or previous to Pontiac's war. We are of the opinion that if there were any locations taken up previous to Pontiac's war, they were not occupied until but a very short period before the opening of the land-office, in 1769.

Among the very first, if not the first altogether, of the settlers north of this road was John Pomroy, a man who was not only the first in respect to time, but who remained among the first men of the settlement in many respects until his death, nearly the space of a generation later.

Pomroy had been raised a farmer in the Cumberland Valley, where his father and some of his brothers lived. They were of Scotch-Irish stock. Having heard of the large quantity of good rich land lying in this region after the occupation of the country by the army of Forbes, he made up his mind to leave his father's roof, and come out and occupy some thereof. He came by way of Ligonier Fort, where it seems he already had relatives and friends who were there under the shadow of the garrison. He did not choose, however, to remain there, but crossed over the Chestnut Ridge, made the selection of a piece of land, erected a cabin, and took possession.

Shortly after he came he had a visit from some passing Indians, who stopped as they passed him. It was not long either until a white man came to his cabin. This man was James Wilson, who afterwards became a neighbor of Pomroy, and who long afterwards, in a ripe age and full of quiet honor, died.

This settlement for all needful purposes may be designated by the village of New Derry. Pomroy having marked off his lands and Wilson having made choice of his tract, Pomroy assisted his neighbor in building his cabin. Their two cabins were about a mile apart, and they passed the nights alternately together.

During that summer these two pioneers raised some corn and potatoes and cleared a small piece, which they sowed in fall grain, the seed for which they had to pack on their backs from Fort Ligonier.

After they had killed some game and stored it away that they might get it in the spring, they set out for a trip to the east of the mountains, where their friends lived.

They passed the winter in their respective homes there, and when the spring came they met by previous agreement, and set out together for their settlement in Derry, then known only as the frontier of Cumberland County.

On this trip they were accompanied by an Irishman named Dunlap. He came out with the purpose of trading and bartering with the Indians. He had received such favorable reports of the cupidity of the natives, and of the profusion of their skins and furs, that he conceived the notion that he could get rich more speedily this way by thrift than he could by the slow and burdensome life of a pioneer. His stock in trade consisted of knives, brooches, beads, and other trinkets, but what he chiefly relied upon was a lot of rum, which he brought on the back of a horse.

The pioneers found matters much as they had left them. There were some evidences of the Indians having been about, but yet there was nothing disturbed. Pomroy and Wilson went at work to shape up their plantation, and Dunlap "waited for customers."

The desired word having reached the Indians, it was not long until a party made their appearance at "Pomroy's Camp." They brought the furs and peltry of the last winter's taking with them, and appeared to be in good "spirits" already for bartering. But when they got a taste of the rum they determined to have a frolic. And in the relation of this commercial transaction we have an instance of a peculiar custom among the Indians, and one seldom mentioned. They having learned the effects of fire-water, had latterly established this custom, which they exercised here. Before giving themselves up to the debauch, they selected one of themselves, and him they vowed to sobriety for the time being, while the rest were drinking. All then that was left to be done or to do was to agree upon the price for the skins per canteen of rum. This was concluded at an exorbitant price and consequently great profit to Duncan.

When they began drinking Duncan began diluting his rum with water, and, notwithstanding that for every canteen of rum taken out of the cask a can-

teenful of water was poured in, yet the Indians became drunker and drunker. Long before the middle of the night the party were all laid out, excepting one of a very robust constitution and the other one whose business it was to stay sober. This first one was now the only one able to come for liquor. This he now did in a demonstrative manner. He would come to the cabin, pounce against the clap-board door, make it fly from its rickety wooden hinges across the cabin floor, and with painted face and a fearful yell, a long knife in one hand, and an empty canteen in the other, confront poor, quaking, and trembling Duncan, shouting out loud, "*Ellick*" (meaning to say his name was Ellick), "*stronger, stronger*" (meaning that he was getting stronger and stronger), "*more lum, more lum.*" Dunlap supplied the canteen filled, and the otter skin was flung at him in return. This Indian was soon thereafter entirely helpless, and they were all with the exception of the watcher laid out. This state of insensibility continued until the next evening. When they recovered they sobered up on rum weakened with water. The day following, being in better condition to do business, they disposed of all their stock of peltry, and retired into the forest.

Duncan vowed that he would never go into this business "at first hands" again, but would resort to legitimate pursuits, and confine his mercantile transactions to within the pale of civilization. He had, however, come William Penn on them to very good advantage. Pomroy and Wilson escorted him through to Ligonier,<sup>1</sup> where he fell in with a safe convoy from Fort Pitt to the East.

It is but proper to say that the recollection of Duncan has been preserved in the families of both Pomroy and Wilson.

The two pioneers, however, returned to their clearings, and devoted all their energies to breaking the soil. The second winter they returned to their old homes east of the mountains, and when they came back again each of them brought a wife. Pomroy's wife was Isabella Barr, the daughter of a neighbor in the Cumberland Valley, who subsequently migrated to Derry township, as well also as his two sons, James Barr and Alexander Barr, who were brothers-in-law of Pomroy, William Guthrie, Richard Wallace, and others.

These two women were among the first to locate in Western Pennsylvania. They are said to have ridden out with the men while they were tracing the boundaries of their claims, for the Indians were at that time numerous and very treacherous, although for a length of time quiet.

<sup>1</sup> Although we do not assume responsibility for the particulars in the account of Duncan's commercial venture, yet it may not be far from the verities, and well serves to illustrate one phase of border life. We see no reason to doubt the relation as it is substantially told. The credit is due to Jonathan K. Row, Esq., a Derry man, in a contribution furnished many years ago to the *Greensburg Herald*.