

HISTORY  
OF  
ARMSTRONG COUNTY,  
PENNSYLVANIA.

BY  
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ILLUSTRATED.

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CHICAGO:  
WATERMAN, WATKINS & CO.  
1883.



GEORGE S. PUTNEY.

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The father of the subject of this sketch, David Putney, the beginner of the improvement which developed into Putneyville, where his descendants reside, was born in Connecticut, October 18, 1794, and came to Pittsburgh, then considered a town of the Far West, before he was of age. There he married, upon September 29, 1818, Miss Lavinia Stevenson, who was born January 7, 1796. The children of David Putney and wife were: James Thompson, born July 8, 1819; George Stevenson, May 29, 1821; David Taylor, August 20, 1823; Mary Eleanor (Smullin), September 26, 1825; William Nelson, April 13, 1829; Samuel Boyd, May 24, 1831; Nelson Osborne, September 7, 1833, and Ezra Judson, July 31, 1837. Of this family the only members now living are the subject of our sketch and Mrs. Smullin, both of whom reside in Putneyville. Shortly after their marriage Mr. and Mrs. Putney moved to Freeport, and it was there that their son George Stevenson was born. In 1833 David Putney purchased from the Holland Land Company, at \$1.50 per acre, a tract of 1,000 acres of land surrounding and including the site of the present village named after him. Soon after this purchase was made, Mr. Putney, with his sons James Thompson and George Stevenson, came to the spot where the village now stands. The bottomlands and the hillsides were then covered with a thick growth of laurel and hazel-brush, through which a road was cut with considerable difficulty. A little shanty was erected upon the creek bank, near where the gristmill now stands. The material of which it was constructed was slabs gathered along the creek, and it was roofed with bark taken in large pieces from trees in the vicinity. This served as their home, and in it George S. Putney discharged the duties of head cook. Instead of plates fresh chips of wood were used, each serving



MRS. GEORGE S. PUTNEY.

for only one meal and then going into the fire over which the next was cooked. About four months later a second cabin was built, similar to and near the first. This was to serve the purpose of a store, and was stocked with a limited assortment of staple goods brought from Freeport and Pittsburgh. For about a year there were no other buildings erected, but during that period Mr. Putney was engaged in working upon a headrace and dam and taking out timber for a grist and saw mill, employing ten or twelve hands. The sawmill was completed the second year. Shanty life no longer possessing the charm of novelty, and now having a mill to manufacture lumber, a story-and-a-half frame dwelling-house was erected—the first in the neighborhood. Father and sons were then made happy by association with the rest of the family, who moved up from Freeport; and George S. Putney, being relieved from the duties of chief cook, was promoted to the position of “boss sawyer” in the mill, and commenced getting out the lumber for the gristmill, which was built and put in successful operation during the third year of the settlement. The elder Mr. Putney was a natural genius in mechanics and a typical New England pioneer, able to turn his hand to almost any industry. With the improvements alluded to business was continued very successfully up to the spring of 1840, by which time considerable land had been cleared and the sunshine allowed to reach the fertile soil of the little valley. A few houses for tenants had also been erected. About this time David Putney contracted to furnish a large amount of timber for the completion of dam No. 1 on the Monongahela river, at Pittsburgh, and to meet the contract he purchased some rafts on Mahoning and Red Bank creeks. But in addition to these purchases he was obliged to buy a tract of timber land on the Clarion river, where he and his son James Thompson went to get out what they needed. The two brothers being greatly

attached to each other, James Thompson refused to stay longer than about thirty days, and returned home. His father then summoned George S. to his assistance. In a reasonable time the timber was all taken out and in readiness for high water to run it to market. George S. Putney, having to remain there awaiting a rise, went to work and took out frame timber for the Methodist Episcopal church at Freeport. To their misfortune there was no freshet during the fall sufficient to afford them the opportunity to make a delivery, and the timber was frozen up in the ice the following winter and lost. In consequence, David Putney became financially involved, and in 1842 was obliged to effect a sale of the greater part of his property to meet his indebtedness. It was then that James Thompson and George S. Putney, by request of their creditors, purchased the grist and saw mills with about 190 acres of land surrounding them, agreeing to pay therefor the sum of \$4,000. This was for the time, and to them, in their condition, a heavy undertaking, as they were entirely destitute of funds and had to rely wholly upon the proceeds of the mills to pay for the property. About the same time they made another purchase, which time has demonstrated to have been a wise one. This was a tract of pine land in Henderson township, Jefferson county, then of small value, but now, left unmolested and with a railroad running through it, worth from \$75,000 to \$80,000. Fortunately for the young men who succeeded their father in business, the Mahoning furnace was put in operation, in 1845, by John A. Colwell & Co., and an outlet was demanded for the metal which they manufactured. This the Putney brothers supplied, putting up a boat scaffold and building boats upon which, under contract, they carried the company's pig-iron down the creek and the Allegheny river to Pittsburgh. They put up a new sawmill, entered into a general lumber business, and in 1848 engaged in merchandizing, taking into partnership in the latter a third brother, David T. These industries were fairly remunerative, but it was the business of building and purchasing boats to carry metal for the furnace people which gave them the greater part of the revenue with which they discharged their indebtedness. By 1852 they had discharged the obligations which they incurred at the start. The partnership in the store remained unchanged until 1854, when David T. Putney went to the West for grain, and on his return home was attacked with cholera and died on the steamer, near St. Louis, May 2, 1855, his remains being brought to Putneyville. In the meantime a tannery had been established, and this, with the two mills, the store, boating interest, etc., was carried on by James T. and George S. Putney quite successfully until the death of the former, December 24, 1858. During this year the gristmill was burned, and at the time of James T. Putney's death a new one was in process of construction. Upon his brother's death, George S. Putney bought from his heirs his entire interest in the firm property, with the exception of two tracts of land. He now had the business of the two mills, the store, tannery and metal-carrying to attend to, and employed his brother, Samuel B. Putney, and A. Smulin to assist him, the former devoting his attention principally to the boat business, and the latter going into the store. Both continued with him during the war. Through this period Mr. Putney carried on business under many disadvantages, chief among which was an almost universal credit system. He had, about the time the war broke out, suffered a severe loss by a great flood, which carried away his milldam, boats, and some other property. But notwithstanding his misfortune, he was able during the war to assist others who needed favors. No soldier's widow or other deserving person was obliged to go without the comforts of life because lacking the cash with which to buy them. His liberality also found expression in large money subscriptions to protect from the draft some of his fellowmen who could ill afford to go into the army and abandon family and the business or labor which supported them. He paid many times the amount which, had he been subject to the draft and

chosen, would have hired a substitute, and did it disinterestedly. Mr. Putney worked on alone, ambitiously, although with little encouragement, until 1868, when he was joined by his sons, W. F. Taylor and L. Miles, the latter assuming the active management and attending to the bookkeeping and buying. From the fact that Mr. Putney had not been able to give his personal attention to the store its business had declined, but under the new management it was rapidly built up, and the other lines of business were correspondingly developed. In 1869 the sawmill was rebuilt, and the boat scaffold soon after. By 1870 the business of the store had so increased that its proprietors were compelled to build an addition. The gristmill was remodeled at a cost of from \$7,000 to \$8,000, and steam introduced in the tannery. Various improvements attested from time to time the enterprise and energy of father and sons. Upon Sunday, October 7, 1877, fire destroyed the store, and Mr. Putney and his sons suffered a loss over and above their insurance of about \$10,000. L. Miles Putney was in New York buying goods at the time, and was apprised of the calamity by telegraph. After a few messages had been passed between himself and the people at home, it was decided to continue the business and he went on with his purchases. Business was resumed, eight days afterward, in a small building and under many disadvantages, but the firm had a prosperous trade. Preparations were made for building a new store as soon as the adjusting agent of the insurance company had estimated and reported the losses by the fire, and the new structure was erected and goods sold in it in April, 1878. It was fully completed by July of that year. This store building, of which the sole architect was Mr. L. Miles Putney, is 80 feet deep by 40 in width, and two stories in height. The store proper, than which there is none finer in Pennsylvania outside of the great cities, is 24x80 feet, and is adjoined by a ware-room and private office. It is a marvel of convenience and elegance, and contains many ingenious devices which are suggestive of the New England descent of its designer. The second story is finished off in fine style as a hall, which is occupied by Putneyville Lodge, No. 735, I. O. O. F.

The firm of George S. Putney & Sons is now engaged in this store, in which they do a large business, in the grist and saw mills, a boat-yard, farming, stock raising and a general lumber business.

Mr. George S. Putney's father, David, lived to see the country in which he settled finely developed and to enjoy the sight of a well-ordered village developed through his own and his family's enterprise upon the land which he took up at an early day in its virgin state. He was honored by an election to the legislature in 1854, and was a useful, esteemed citizen all of his life. He died August 31, 1879, and his wife, Lavina, April 20, 1873.

George S. Putney, who has carried on and amplified the enterprises begun by his father, and resulting in the building up of Putneyville, has been, like him, a most highly respected resident of Armstrong county, and one who has materially aided in its improvement. He was elected to the legislature, upon the democratic ticket, in 1870, defeating M. M. Steele. He has held nearly all the offices of trust and honor in the gift of his fellow-townsmen, and both in official and private life done much to advance the interests of the community. The new house of worship of the Methodist Episcopal church, of which he is a member, was built largely through his influence and pecuniary aid.

Mr. Putney was married, October 10, 1844, to Margaret, daughter of Jacob and Susannah Andrews, born in Allegheny county, July 25, 1826. To his wife, a very superior woman, great credit is due for wise assistance which very materially enhanced her husband's success and prosperity. The offspring of this union were six sons, of whom four are living. Their names and respective dates of birth are as follows: Nelson Boyd, born October 20, 1845 (died April 27, 1861); William Taylor, June 30, 1847; Lemuel Miles, June 17, 1849; Homer Clark, December 25, 1855 (died April 6, 1881); George Wesley, October 8, 1860, and Calvin Kingsley, April 23, 1867.

William Taylor Putney was married to Clara B. Hamilton, December 25, 1872, and George Wesley Putney to Nancy Nolf, December 8, 1881.