

HISTORY

OF THE

COUNTY OF WESTMORELAND,

PENNSYLVANIA,

WITH

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

OF MANY OF ITS

PIONEERS AND PROMINENT MEN.

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ILLUSTRATED.

PHILADELPHIA:

L. H. EVERTS & CO.

1882.

As applicable at this place we may bring in the adventures of some Westmorelanders in the far West. Both instances show of what mettle the men were of, and both instances are as fully authentic as the best attested ones of their class.

In the fall of 1795, Capt. John Sloan, his nephew, John Wallace, and two others, named Hunt and Knott, all hardy young men and fond of adventure, formed themselves into a company to explore part of the western country, and to make a tour of observation. They were neighbors, as it went then, and lived near the Loyalhanna, in Derry township. They set out after some preparation, taking with them two horses and some provisions; and when their store of provisions became lighter, they walked and rode time about. They had a strong desire to see the Miami country, of which there was so much talk, and went direct for Fort Washington, the site of Cincinnati. That region from this point was a journey of some days farther to the northwest. They proceeded, however, and encamped at night on the banks of the Big Maumee. The next morning they continued on. As they took their turn at riding, it was now Knott and Sloan's time to ride. These were upon the horses when they were fired upon by a large party of Indians who were hid in the path. Knott fell from his horse dead. Sloan was shot through the left side, a ball also going through his shot-pouch. Hunt and Wallace ran for their lives, but Hunt was taken by them without getting off. Wallace was pursued by the pack, but he kept ahead of them till, running at full speed, he tripped on a root and fell headlong, when his gun slipped from his grasp. Sloan had secured the horse from which Knott fell, and notwithstanding his severe wound, still kept upon his own. When Wallace regained his feet he called to his uncle not to leave him. Sloan waited on him. When he came up he tried to get up on the horse's back, but was so exhausted that he fell back. His uncle, Sloan, then took his gun, and holding it and the horse's head, waited till Wallace climbed up. By this the Indians were close upon them. The horses under the excitement galloped off on the trail, and soon left the Indians behind. Then, after they were on their way, Sloan, "like another Lancelot," noticed the blood trickling from his wound down his horse's side. They headed for Fort Washington, which they wished by all means to reach, but they knew of Fort Hamilton, which was somewhat off their way, but between them and the former. Besides this, Sloan said they felt in duty bound to stop there and warn the garrison. They directed their way thither, and in no long time entered this fort. There they stayed that night and related their adventure.

But they were especially anxious to get to Fort

Washington, where medical assistance could be obtained for Sloan. The next morning they were to start, but on opening the gates they saw that the fort was surrounded by Indians. There were said to be many hundreds of them there. At that time there was but a very small and inefficient garrison at this post, there being in all only twenty men, women, and children, while their commandant was a young and inexperienced officer. The Indians, knowing the feeble state of the garrison, and presuming that no defense could be successfully made, demanded their surrender. The officer in command said to Sloan that he could not hold the fort, and told Sloan that if he thought he could make a defense to take command and do what he thought best.

Sloan then, having thus been empowered to talk on the subject, went up to the top of the fort and engaged in a conversation with their leader. He talked by the medium of an interpreter. Close beside the interpreter stood Hunt, the companion of Sloan, who had been taken the day before, and he, too, pleaded with Sloan to give up the fort, for the reason understood that if the Indians did not accomplish their object their prisoner would be tortured. But Sloan told them a nice story of how they had plenty of provisions and ammunition, and how they would soon have a reinforcement to join them, assuring them at the end that they did not propose to surrender at all, but to fight. Then he stepped down.

The next moment they all fired, and the Indians set up their war-whoop, a sign of no quarter. The firing continued all day, but without any effect, for the Indians kept at a good distance, and the whites were well protected. At night an attempt was made to fire the fort, but it was not successful. There was a stable at some distance, where the horses were kept and near which the cattle were fed. During the siege an Indian took Sloan's horse from here, and putting on his head the cocked hat which Sloan had lost the day before he rode in a circle around the fort far enough away to be out of danger, and when the Indians went off they took all the horses with them, and what cattle they had not killed and eaten they shot and left lying.

During the fight an Indian got pretty close to the fort by keeping under the shelter of a corn-crib, where, remaining under cover, he kept up a vigorous fire whenever he saw anything to shoot at. Sloan watched this one attentively. He himself had taken a position near a port-hole, and as his side was troublesome he had a man to load the gun and pass it to him as he needed it. It was at length apparent that the Indian wanted to retire. To accomplish this he pushed betimes the muzzle of his gun beyond the covering, that some one expecting him to show himself would fire at him. Sloan fired; the Indian, as it was expected he would, jumped out, but by this time Sloan had his other gun ready which he also fired, when the Indian fell over dead. This one was too close to the fort to be taken away by the rest, and he was left

lying there. All the hostiles finally withdrew, either fearful of reinforcements coming up from the other posts or led away with some other object in view. When they had gone Capt. Sloan went to the Indian whom he had shot, and finding in his belt a scalping-knife he lifted the Indian's scalp. His hair was strung full of beads. Hunt, their companion, was never heard of. Sloan and Wallace, after remaining at Fort Washington, whither they went, for a time, returned home.¹

¹ This is from the account given by Capt. Sloan's son, John Sloan, Jr., to Rev. Sharrad, of Steubenville, Ohio, in 1871. Capt. Sloan did not remain in the West, but came back, and was subsequently elected sheriff of this county. He suffered from his wound till he died. He produced this scalp on many public occasions, and I have seen persons who saw it on such occasions. (See local history of Derry township.)