

HISTORY
OF
WASHINGTON COUNTY,
PENNSYLVANIA,
WITH
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

OF MANY OF ITS
PIONEERS AND PROMINENT MEN.

EDITED BY
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ILLUSTRATED.

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The Rev. Joseph Smith, one of the early settlers in Hopewell, was of English parentage. His father settled on the road leading from the Susquehanna River to Wilmington, Del., near what is called Rising Sun, in the township of Nottingham, Md., where Joseph was born in 1736. His early education fitted him for a collegiate course, and he entered Princeton College, where he graduated in 1764, when he was twenty-eight years of age. He was licensed by the Presbytery of New Castle to preach the gospel at Drawyers, Aug. 5, 1767. On the 20th of October, 1768, he accepted a call from the congregation of Lower Brandywine, and was ordained and installed as pastor April 19, 1769. A short time before he was licensed he had married Esther, daughter of William Cummins, merchant, of Cecil County, Md. His relation of pastor was dissolved Aug. 26, 1772. At the same meeting of Presbytery he received a call from the congregations of Rocky Creek and Long Cane, S. C., which he declined, and acted as a supply to his former congregation for one year, and also preached at Wilmington, Del. On the 12th of August, 1773, a call from the Second Church of Wilmington was placed in his hands by the Presbytery; this call he held till the fall of the next year, when the congregations of Wilmington and Lower Brandywine having united, he accepted a united call, and became their pastor Oct. 27, 1774. In these churches he labored until April 29, 1778, when at his request the connection was dissolved. In the fall of that year he was taken suddenly and dangerously ill of a fever, and only recovered after a long and severe term of sickness.

At that time Judge James Edgar, who had for several years been an acquaintance and intimate friend of his, was living in what is now Washington County,

and it has been said that it was largely through his influence that Mr. Smith was induced in the spring of 1779 to visit this section of country, to which the Rev. John McMillan had removed with his family a few months before, and where the Rev. James Power had resided since 1776. A short time after his return from the West Mr. Smith received through his Presbytery a call dated June 21, 1779, from the united congregations of Buffalo and Cross Creek, promising him £150 per annum. This call was signed by two hundred and four persons, with an amount of subscriptions already raised reaching £197 5s. 5d. The call and subscription-list were embodied in one paper—an original and singular document—thought to have been drawn up by James Edgar, who had been for some time an elder in the Cross Creek Congregation. Mr. Smith accepted the call on the 29th of October, 1779, and in the following year moved his family to his new field of labor, and settled in what soon after became Hopewell township, and where he passed the remainder of his life.

On the 2d of May, 1780, he purchased from Joseph Wells three hundred and seventy-six acres of land lying on the waters of Cross Creek, the consideration being £1625. Of this tract Mr. Smith afterwards sold eighty-four acres to Thomas Polke, and later it was sold to Robert Fulton. When Mr. Smith purchased the land of Wells he depended largely on the prospective income from his salary as a means of meeting the payments, a calculation which brought him no little disappointment afterwards. The Rev. James W. Miller relates an incident having reference to the financial relations between Mr. Smith and his people, as follows :

“He found them a willing and united people, but still unable to pay him a salary which would support his family. He in common with all the early ministers must cultivate a farm. He purchased one on credit, promising to pay for it with the salary pledged to him by his people. Years passed away. The pastor was unpaid. Little or no money was in circulation. Wheat was abundant, but there was no market; it could not be sold for more than twelve and a half cents in cash. Even their salt had to be brought across the mountains on pack-horses, was worth eight dollars a bushel, and twenty-one bushels of wheat had often to be given for one of salt. The time came when the last payment must be made, and Mr. Smith was told he must pay or leave his farm. Three years' salary was now due from his people. For the want of this his land, his improvements upon it, and his hopes of remaining among a beloved people, must be abandoned. The people were called together and the case laid before them; they were greatly moved; counsel from on high was sought; plan after plan was proposed and abandoned; the congregations were unable to pay a tithe of their debts, and no money could be borrowed. In despair they adjourned to meet again the following week. In the mean time it was ascertained that a Mr. Moore . . . would grind for them wheat on reasonable terms. At the next meeting it was resolved to carry their wheat to Mr. Moore's mill; some gave fifty bushels, some more. This was carried from fifteen to twenty-six miles on horses to mill. In a month word came that the flour was ready to go to market. Again the people were called together. After an earnest prayer, the question was asked, ‘Who will run the flour to New Orleans?’ This was a startling question. The work was perilous in the extreme; months must pass before the adventurer could hope to return, even though his journey should be fortunate; nearly all the way was a wilderness, and gloomy tales had been told of the treacherous Indian. More than one boat's crew had gone on that journey and came back no more. Who, then, would endure the toil and brave the danger? None volunteered; the young shrunk back and the middle-aged had their

excuse. The scheme at last seemed likely to fail. At length a hoary-headed man, an elder in the church, sixty-four years of age, arose, and to the astonishment of the assembly, said, 'Here am I; send me.' The deepest feeling at once pervaded the assembly. To see their venerated old elder thus devote himself for their good melted them all to tears. They gathered around Father Smiley to learn that his resolution was indeed taken; that, rather than lose their pastor, he would brave danger, toil, and even death. After some delay and trouble two young men were induced by hope of large reward to go as his assistants. A day was appointed for their starting. The young and old from far and near, from love to Father Smiley, and their deep interest in the object of his mission, gathered together, and, with their pastor at their head, came down from the church, fifteen miles away, to the bank of the river to bid the old man farewell. Then a prayer was offered up by their pastor, a parting hymn was sung. 'There,' said the old Scotchman, 'untie the cable, and let us see what the Lord will do for us.' This was done and the boat floated slowly away. More than nine months passed and no word came back from Father Smiley. Many a prayer had been breathed for him, but what was his fate was unknown. Another Sabbath came; the people came together for worship, and there, on his rude bench before the preacher, composed and devout, sat Father Smiley. After the services the people were requested to meet early in the week to hear the report. All came again. After thanks had been returned to God for his safe return, Father Smiley rose and told his story; that the Lord had prospered his mission, that he had sold his flour for twenty-seven dollars a barrel, and then got safely back. He then drew a large purse, and poured upon the table a larger pile of gold than any of the spectators had ever seen before. The young men were each paid a hundred dollars. Father Smiley was asked his charges. He meekly replied that he thought he ought to have the same as one of the young men, though he had not done quite as much work. It was immediately proposed to pay him three hundred dollars. This he refused till the pastor was paid. Upon counting the money it was found there was enough to pay what was due Mr. Smith, to advance his salary for the year to come, to reward Father Smiley with three hundred dollars, and then have a large dividend for each contributor. Thus their debts were paid, their pastor relieved, and while life lasted he broke for them the bread of life. The bones of both pastor and elder have long reposed in the same churchyard, but a grateful posterity still tells this pleasing story of the past."

After the removal of his financial difficulties by the fortunate issue of Father Smiley's trip to New Orleans, Mr. Smith took up more land, including the tracts "Welcome" and "Mount Joy," amounting to seven hundred and sixty-six acres.

In the year 1785 he opened a select school with a special view to the training of young men for the ministry. Mr. Dodd's school on Ten-Mile Creek had just closed, and three young men from that school, James McGready, Samuel Porter, and Joseph Patterson, began a course of study with Mr. Smith. The class was soon afterwards joined by James Hughes and John Brice. The school was at first taught in a room which Mr. Smith had built for a kitchen, but was afterwards held in a building erected for that especial purpose in his garden. It was continued for some time, and was finally merged in the academy at Canonsburg, afterwards Jefferson College. To the project of the academy Mr. Smith gave his hearty support. He labored with his people until his death, which occurred quite suddenly on the 19th of April, 1792. His remains were interred in the graveyard at Upper Buffalo. His wife survived him more than twenty-eight years, and died Oct. 7, 1820, in the seventy-eighth year of her age.

The Rev. Joseph Smith left three sons and five daughters. To his son, William Cummins Smith, he bequeathed two hundred acres of land; to his daugh-

ter Mary one hundred acres; and the same amount to his daughter Agnes. These lands were parts of the tracts "Welcome" and "Mount Joy." To his son David, who was a minister of the same denomination, he left seventy pounds in gold "for y^e single purpose of supporting my said son David in his learning." To his daughters Esther, Elizabeth, and Naomi Smith he left the tract "Argyle," containing three hundred and eighty-five acres. To his son Joseph he left two hundred and seventy-eight acres, the homestead, it being a part of the tract "Mount Joy." Of the daughters of Mr. Smith, one died in early womanhood; Mary became the wife of Rev. James Hughes, the first president of Miami University; Agnes became the wife of the Rev. James Welch; and Esther the wife of the Rev. William Wylie. Another daughter became the wife of the Rev. Joseph Anderson. Of the three sons, one died while preparing for the ministry. David became a minister, preached with great success for nine years, and died at the age of thirty-two. Several of the grandsons of Mr. Smith also became ministers.