

HISTORY
OF
ALLEGHENY COUNTY
PENNSYLVANIA.

INCLUDING

ITS EARLY SETTLEMENT AND PROGRESS TO THE PRESENT TIME; A DESCRIPTION
OF ITS HISTORIC AND INTERESTING LOCALITIES; ITS CITIES, TOWNS AND
VILLAGES; RELIGIOUS, EDUCATIONAL, SOCIAL AND MILITARY HISTORY;
MINING, MANUFACTURING AND COMMERCIAL INTERESTS;
IMPROVEMENTS, RESOURCES, STATISTICS, ETC.

ALSO

PORTRAITS OF SOME OF ITS PROMINENT MEN, AND BIOGRAPHIES OF MANY
OF ITS REPRESENTATIVE CITIZENS.

IN TWO PARTS.

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JOHN THAW. John Thaw, late of Pittsburgh, Pa., was born March 11, 1779, and died Sept. 3, 1866. The grandfather, John Thaw, was born in Philadelphia in 1710, where he lived to a ripe old age, dying in 1795. His bones now lie buried near Philadelphia, in Abingdon churchyard.

Benjamin, next in the line of succession, was born in Philadelphia in 1753, and married Hannah, daughter of Joseph Engle, whose parents, Benjamin and Deborah Engle, were English Quakers who settled in Philadelphia late in the seventeenth century. Of the children of Benjamin and Hannah Thaw, the subject of this sketch, John Thaw, was the second son. On July 2, 1802, he married Elizabeth Thomas, daughter of a sea captain lost at sea some years previously.

His early manhood was as adventurous and unsettled as his long subsequent career was uneventful and serene. Apprenticed early in life to Paul Beck, a Philadelphia shipping merchant, and from his calling having much to do with those that "did business in great waters," he acquired a fondness for a seafaring life, which he soon was offered the opportunity to gratify. He was appointed supercargo of a vessel, which, upon its first West Indian voyage, was seized (under Napoleon's Milan decree) and taken into Guadeloupe, whence, when at length released, he managed to return, only to be overtaken on the way, however, by a more serious distress, the yellow fever, that fell disease breaking out and striking down his crew, he, almost alone of all on board, escaping.

Afterward, undertaking to trade on his own account, he sent a ship laden with such wares as were merchantable there to Senegal, Africa. The captain of the vessel, reaching his destination, disposed of his goods, bought slaves on his own account, and, returning, sold them in the West Indies and ran away with the proceeds. (A curious memorial of this adventure is preserved in the office of Mr. W. L. Jones, agent of the Insurance Company of North America in Pittsburgh, being the policy of insurance issued to John Thaw in 1801 for this voyage to Africa, which was presented to Mr. Jones more than sixty years afterward, and is valued by him as an interesting evidence of the venerable standing of his company.) The loss resulted in financial ruin to Mr. Thaw. He next sought and found service in the Bank of Pennsylvania at Philadelphia; was one of two sent out shortly after to establish a branch at Pittsburgh, in 1804, which, in 1817, was transferred to the old United States Bank, he shifting with it to serve as its cashier until the doom decreed by President Jackson brought it to an end Dec. 31, 1836.

Having acquired a comfortable competency, he then retired from active business,

and spent a serene old age, holding no position but that of secretary of the Monongahela Smithfield Street Bridge company. He had filled this little place from the incorporation of the company in 1816, and in his old age its light but systematic duties were so agreeable to him that only in 1864, after forty-eight years of service, did he consent to lay them down.

His wife died in June, 1865, and his own death followed Sept. 3, 1866—a union unbroken for sixty-three years, sixty-one years spent in Pittsburgh, during which a large family sprang up around them, marrying and multiplying to the fourth generation, so that in his last years he was the still living head of a numerous and widespread connection. Mr. Thaw's characteristics were marked. His straightforward business methods were upright and severe to the verge of austerity, but at heart he had a broad and comprehensive tolerance, and a practical regard for the welfare of all that made his daily life that of a good and kind as well as just man.

His extremely systematic habits are curiously illustrated by a continuous set of books of account found in his private desk after his death, and never before seen by his family, in which his entire private business was conducted in the most precise forms of double-entry bookkeeping, balanced regularly every year, and covering the whole period from March 11, 1800, to March, 1864—two years before his death. These books open with an account of stock taken the day he was twenty-one, when little more than his personal outfit constituted the items of his first entry in a set of books destined to have such a prolonged, unbroken life. It is, however, as the pioneer banker that Mr. Thaw's biography appears in this publication, his career in that capacity, though a long one, having ended more than fifty years ago.

WILLIAM THAW. One of the most important factors in the prosperity of Pittsburgh and Allegheny county has been the rapid and thorough development of transportation facilities connecting them with distant points, thereby furnishing markets for the immense natural wealth which has made Pittsburgh one of the foremost manufacturing cities in the country, if not in the world. If the establishment of Fort Pitt at the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela was a military necessity in the infancy of our country, the erection of manufacturing establishments was no less a necessity in times of peace. The manufacturer, however, would be limited but for the facilities afforded for carrying the products of the mill and of the furnace and the forge to other parts of the country. The first medium of transportation, of course, was by wagon, soon to be followed by the stagecoach, the canal-boat and the flatboat, and later by the railway, which could climb the mountains and descend to the valleys, almost annihilating distance, and bringing the producer and the consumer

near together. Many have been witnesses to this development, though but few have been permitted to take part in it through its various stages. A prominent figure among these few is Mr. William Thaw, second vice-president of the Pennsylvania company, and manager of one of the great lines that go to make up that immense organization. His experience is an illustration of the rapidity of the evolution from the wagon-train and stagecoach to the palace car and lightning express train.

William Thaw was born in Pittsburgh, Oct. 12, 1818. He is of Scotch-Irish descent, tracing his lineage back to the time of Cromwell, with whom his ancestors, stern Covenanters, were in hearty sympathy. His great-grandfather, John Thaw, was born in Philadelphia in 1710, died in 1795, and now lies buried in Abingdon churchyard. Benjamin, grandfather of William Thaw, was born in 1753, married Hannah, daughter of Joseph Engle, whose parents, Benjamin and Deborah Engle, were of an old Philadelphia Quaker family, and died in 1811. Of their children was John Thaw, a sketch of whom appears above.

William Thaw was born fourteen years after his parents removed to Pittsburgh. His education began at the common schools and was finished in the Western University of Pennsylvania. He began business in 1834, as clerk in his father's bank, and Feb. 9, 1835, he entered the service of McKee, Clarke & Co., forwarding and commission merchants, as a clerk. In 1840 he formed a partnership with Thomas S. Clarke, as Clarke & Thaw, transporters and owners of steam- and canal-boats, which they continued until 1855. During these years the canal system was the great channel of communication between the east and the west. This had been suggested as early as 1792, but the links in the chain were not connected until the fall of 1834, when the Philadelphia and Columbia road and the Allegheny Portage road were completed, making, with the canal, a through line between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. This gave a wonderful impetus to the latter city, and the business of furnishing transportation became one of the most important lines of enterprise. Clarke & Thaw owned and controlled the Pennsylvania & Ohio line, and held their own. The advent of steam worked a revolution in trade and commerce. The Pennsylvania railroad had its beginning April 13, 1846. The work of construction began at Harrisburg in July, 1847. The last division was opened Feb. 15, 1854, and the subsequent purchase of the Philadelphia & Columbia road gave the Pennsylvania Railroad company through rail connection from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh, and, of course, put an end to the canals. The history of the subsequent growth of this great corporation is familiar to everyone. By successive purchases or leases it has acquired control of and operates 3,211.2 miles of railway. As the railroad system of the country grew, the waterway lines gradually went out of exist-

ence. Recognizing the inevitable result of the contest, Mr. Thaw gave himself to the task of disposing of his transportation lines with the least possible loss, and then turned his attention to the new system. In 1856 he joined his former partner, Thomas S. Clarke, who had the previous year undertaken the conduct of the freight traffic of the Pennsylvania railroad between Pittsburgh and all points west. At this time there was no system of through bills of lading and through cars as now prevails, and each road worked "upon its own hook." The whole business of freight transportation was in an almost chaotic state, and the expenses were tremendous. About 1864 the Pennsylvania Railroad company devised a system of through transportation over different lines, and the Star Union Line was the result. Of this Mr. Thaw had charge until 1873. Mr. Thaw receives and is entitled to a large share of the credit of evolving this system, but he, with characteristic sincerity and modesty, disdains any special credit, and says that his labor was shared by many others, and that the system grew of itself and out of the necessities of the situation. The Pennsylvania company was chartered April 7, 1870, for the purpose of managing, in the interest of the Pennsylvania Railroad company, which owns all the stock of the former company, the roads controlled by the latter west of Pittsburgh. The importance of this company may be estimated when one looks at the list of lines concentrated under its system. Among them are the Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne & Chicago, the Erie & Pittsburgh, the Cleveland & Pittsburgh and its branches, the Pittsburgh, Cincinnati & St. Louis (Pan Handle), the Chicago, St. Louis & Pittsburgh, the Cincinnati & Muskingum Valley, the Little Miami, the St. Louis, Vandalia & Terre Haute, the Grand Rapids & Indiana, and many more. Mr. Thaw is a director in the Pennsylvania Railroad company, second vice-president of the Pennsylvania company, and second vice-president of the P., C. & St. L. Ry., included in the above lines. Since 1873 he has been relieved of most of the duties connected with the transportation department, and gives his attention to the internal and financial affairs of the company.

Mr. Thaw has for many years been a member of the Third Presbyterian Church. He is a director in the Allegheny cemetery. He has been an earnest and generous friend of the Allegheny observatory, and to his liberality that institution is largely indebted for the financial help that has enabled it to prosecute its work. It was through his aid that the expedition of Prof. Langley to Mt. Whitney, in Southern California, some years ago was made possible.

Mr. Thaw has been twice married, and has a large family of children and grandchildren. Six sons and four daughters are living, of whom three are married. In his personal relations Mr. Thaw is one of the most estimable men in Pittsburgh. His large

fortune is used for the noblest of purposes. His donations to his *alma mater*, the Western University of Pennsylvania, for which he cherishes a warm affection, aggregate three or four hundred thousand dollars, while he has given liberally to other educational institutions, as Hanover, Oberlin, Wooster University, Geneva, Carroll (Wisconsin), the college at Maryville, Tenn., the Western Theological Seminary and others. Charitable institutions of all kinds find in him a liberal and generous contributor.

Mentally he is among the foremost men of the state, gifted with a high order of intellect, strengthened by liberal culture and years of study and observation. He is an excellent judge of men, and quick to detect any shams or pretenses. His reasonings, based upon his convictions of right and duty, are never degraded to the service of expediency or mendacity. Impetuous and persistent, he is yet cautious in all that he does. Broad in his views, buoyant in disposition, honest, sincere and self-reliant, strictly upright in all his transactions, he has worthily won and as worthily holds a high position in the esteem and affection of all who know him. His sympathies and benefactions are bounded by no narrow lines of creed or prejudice, and his large benefactions go in every direction in which good may be accomplished. When he shall have passed to his last account, it will be said of him that the world is better for his having lived.