

COMMEMORATIVE

BIOGRAPHICAL RECORD

— OF —

CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA,

INCLUDING THE COUNTIES OF

Centre, Clearfield, Jefferson and Clarion,

CONTAINING

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF PROMINENT AND REPRESENTATIVE
CITIZENS, AND OF MANY OF THE EARLY SETTLED FAMILIES.

— ILLUSTRATED —

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HARRY R. WILSON, a prominent attorney of Clarion, of the firm of Wilson & Gordon, is a son of the late Judge Theophilus S. and Amanda L. Wilson, and grandson of Samuel Wilson and William H. Lowry.

Born at Clarion, Penn., his present home, September 3, 1864, he received his early education in the public schools of the borough. He was specially prepared for college under Prof. and Mrs. Thrasher, at the Clarion Normal School, then called Carrier Seminary, and entered La-Fayette College in September, 1880. He completed his four-year course there, and graduated above the average grade of his class in his nineteenth year, and at once registered as a student-at-law with Wilson, Jenks & Reed, where he remained until the dissolution of the firm, in November, 1885, upon the retirement of Hon. Theo. S. Wilson, who had been elected president judge of Clarion and Jefferson counties. On November 8, 1886, he was admitted to practice in the several courts of Clarion county. In January, 1887, Mr. Wilson succeeded Hon. George A. Jenks, ex-Solicitor-General of the United States, in the firm of Jenks & Reed, and continued in active practice of the law as the junior member of the firm of Reed & Wilson, who did a large volume of legal business in Clarion and surrounding counties, and also in the Supreme and United States Courts, for the

next eight years, when Hon. John W. Reed was appointed, and afterward elected, president judge of Jefferson county. Upon the retirement of Mr. Reed from the firm, Mr. Wilson, having more legal business than he and his assistants could do, associated Cadmus Z. Gordon, Esq., with him, and the new firm of Wilson & Gordon continues to keep the legal business of this firm up to the same high standard established by their predecessors, Wilson & Jenks, from 1870 to 1885, Jenks & Reed, from 1885 to 1887, and by Reed & Wilson from 1887 to 1895. The first ten years of the business life of Mr. Wilson, from 1886 to 1896, from when he was twenty-two to thirty-two years of age, were brimful of activity. In addition to the exacting duties and responsibilities of his profession, which, with him, were always the first consideration, and were never neglected for politics or outside business interests; he as a traveler visited each township and borough in his native county; each county in his native State; each State and Territory in the United States. He also visited Mexico and Canada, and all the principal cities of the United States. He also rode, in 1889, over eighteen hundred miles through different countries in Europe on a bicycle, and visited Ireland, Scotland, England, France, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, Holland, Norway, Sweden, Russia, Austria and Italy. While absent on these trips, entertaining and instructive letters from him were published in the Clarion newspapers. In the spring of 1898 Mr. and Mrs. Wilson made a three-months' cruise to points around the Mediterranean Sea, up the Nile and a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and returned through Italy, Switzerland and Germany.

Soon after he became of age he was selected and acted as executor and guardian in several estates, and settled and filed his final accounts therein without any differences. He was the counsel for the executors in the largest decedent's estate, and for the assignee in the largest assigned estate that has ever been settled in Clarion county. He has averaged from ten to twelve hours steady work a day for the past twelve years, and now with an established reputation, business and property, has something to show for it, and prospects of still better results. Associated with business partners, he has purchased and developed coal lands in Clarion county, and timber lands in Forest county, where Wagner & Wilson are now operating several thousand acres of timber land with saw, shingle, lath and planing mills; also operating seven miles of railroad, and give steady employment to a large force of men. Mr. Wilson has carried

interests in oil and gas wells; built houses, and bought at private sale and re-sold lots and residence properties in Clarion borough, farms in Clarion county, and real estate in Jefferson, Venango, Forest and other counties. Financially he is a self-made man. He started on a law clerkship of twenty-five dollars per month, and his credit has since always been good to borrow any capital needed for any promising purchase.

As a Republican he has presided over the County Convention, as a committeeman elected from Clarion borough, and he was a delegate to the State Convention in 1887, and a delegate from the 28th Congressional District to the Republican National Convention at St. Louis in 1896. He was offered and declined the Republican nomination for Representative to the Legislature, and for State Senator in his District, at different times before he was twenty-six years old. He has never aspired to any office, as it has been more of an effort for him to keep out than to get into politics. He was chairman of the Clarion County Republican Committee in 1895, and re-elected chairman for the Presidential campaign of 1896; he perfected the organization and led the campaign in Clarion county for 1896. He made speeches at all of the series of about twenty-five meetings, and did much work, the result of which showed in the increase of the vote for the Republican nominees about eight hundred in Clarion county over that of 1892.

On October 24, 1894, at Elnora, N. Y., Mr. Wilson was united in marriage with Hattie Davie Critchlow, and the union has been blessed with two sons: Harold M. and Lawrence E. Wilson. The father united with the Presbyterian Church in 1891, and served two terms of three years each as one of the Board of Trustees, and upon the expiration of his second term in 1895, he was elected by vote of the congregation as one of the presiding elders. He was one of the early promoters and largest subscribers for the building of the new stone church edifice, and the first to sign and circulate the subscription list in 1892, and takes an active interest in the progress and work of the Church. He is a member of the Masonic Blue Lodge and Chapter of Clarion and Knight Templar Commandery of Franklin, Pennsylvania.

The diversified interests which have received the attention of the subject of this sketch have not, however, weakened his professional standing or prevented him from having earned the reputation and being recognized as a hard-working, conscientious, safe, honest and able attorney and counselor-at-law. Among his clientage are seven of the nine banks in the county. He is

counsel for several boroughs and townships in the county, supervisors, overseers of the poor, and school boards and for many of the private business corporations, business firms and individuals. He has a commodious brick office well located near the court house, with the largest and most valuable law library in the county—of about one thousand, five hundred volumes. As he grows older and has become the senior member of the firm, he is dropping all outside business interests and politics (except for recreation), and is concentrating his attention and work more and more on the practice of the law in all its branches, and stands prominent among the fellow-members of the Clarion Bar for promptness, industry, courtesy and ability.

HON. THEOPHILUS STRATTAN WILSON (deceased), one of the most talented and distinguished members of the Clarion county Bar, and who at the time of his death was Judge of the 18th Judicial District of Pennsylvania, was born April 17, 1837, at Strattanville, a village of Clarion county, Penn., located three miles east of the county seat.

Judge Wilson's ancestors were among the pioneers of that section of country, and in their history are to be found rare elements of romance. At the beginning of this century that portion of the State in which are now Clarion and Jefferson counties was an unsettled wilderness. Hither, in 1801, came a band of earnest, energetic patriots, determined to do their part in extending the settlement of their country. They numbered ten men, among whom was Samuel Wilson, the great-grandfather of Judge Wilson. They reached their destination after experiencing all the privations that in those days attended the progress of the early settlers, their journey requiring the opening up of an unbroken forest, at a period not long after a time of fierce Indian conflicts. Samuel Wilson died within a year afterward. His widow and five sons settled on the land he had broken, and to one of these sons, Robert (the second man married in Clarion county), was born a son Samuel, the third one in the family of that name, and who became the father of Judge Wilson. In 1836 Samuel Wilson (3) married Elizabeth Moran, of Haddenfield, N. J., who was of the family of John Strattan, the founder of Strattanville, from which family Theophilus, their first born, received his second name.

Samuel Wilson began life as a clerk in the store of Hon. Charles Evans, the pioneer merchant in his section, but in 1834, when only

twenty-six years of age, he started in business for himself. He was a shrewd and far-seeing man, was remarkably successful, and rapidly accumulated a fortune. When the iron industry started in Clarion county, he was one of the first to invest in it, and became a heavy manufacturer, building, in company with his brother John, St. Charles furnace, in Porter township. He afterward purchased Helen furnace, in Highland township, where he made thousands of tons of pig iron. He also interested himself in boat-building, acquired extensive lumber interests, owned several stores, and employed several hundred men in various enterprises. On the breaking out of the War of the Rebellion Gov. Curtin specially commissioned him to purchase supplies for the quartermaster's department. He was president of the First National Bank of Clarion, a position which he held until his death, which occurred at his home in Strattanville, January 21, 1879, when he was aged seventy-one years.

Theophilus Wilson had the advantage of being well prepared for his college education, first by private tutors, afterward at the public schools, and then at the Brookville Academy, in Jefferson county. He received his collegiate education at Allegheny College, Meadville, Penn. In 1854, while he was yet a lad, his father chose him to fill out a year's leave of absence of his chief clerk—a most responsible and difficult position. At the close of his term in charge of the business, Theophilus was sent to Helen furnace, which was owned by his father, where was manufactured a superior brand of iron, known to the trade as "Charcoal Iron," its consistent parts being red hematite ore, limestone, and oak charcoal. At first Theophilus took charge of the Furnace store, soon he was promoted to chief bookkeeper, and, showing a broad understanding of business principles, became manager of the entire business. The qualities of fine intelligence, persistent application, and indomitable energy, he displayed, thus pushed him to the forefront of a vocation he was only destined to follow temporarily, but which was of great advantage to him in his future career, having been, as he himself since remarked, "more beneficial to him in his profession and in his judicial career than his classical education." In 1860, the market for pig iron having become unprofitable, Mr. Samuel Wilson determined to close out his business in that line, and it was permanently discontinued. This made it necessary for Theophilus to decide upon his future course, and he chose the profession of law. The same year he was registered a student and entered the office of George W. Lathy, at that time the

oldest practitioner at the Bar of Clarion county. In the spring of 1861 he moved from Helen furnace to Clarion, and in September of the same year passed a creditable examination before the board of examiners, and was admitted to the Bar before Hon. Gleni W. Scofield, Presiding Judge of the Warren District and then holding a special term in Clarion, and afterward one of the judges of the United States Court of Claims, at Washington. Mr. Wilson practiced law in Clarion for over a year, when the appointment of Mr. John Keatly, of Strattanville, Additional Paymaster of United States volunteers, gave the young lawyer a new experience. Heavy bonds being required for the Paymaster, Mr. Wilson's father and father-in-law furnished them, and Theophilus was made Paymaster's clerk. The young man was then twenty-four years of age, active, ardent and patriotic, and not in the least inclined to follow a then comparatively inactive and uneventful profession while the whole country was alive and so much of importance was "making history" and stirring men's blood. The war was well advanced, and the Paymaster's department was a responsible, active, and even dangerous one. Mr. Keatley and Mr. Wilson were first assigned to duty in the pay department of Kentucky, with headquarters at Cincinnati, Ohio, ex-Gov. Cumbach, of Indiana, in charge. Soon they were ordered to Washington to pay the troops in the Army of the Potomac, and later were assigned to the department of Maryland, with headquarters at Baltimore, Major C. W. Brice, afterward Paymaster-General, in charge. In addition to paying the troops in Maryland, they were sent into the Shenandoah Valley, and paid all the troops in and around Harpers Ferry, Winchester, Romney, and Martinsburg, W. Va. At Winchester, in 1862, when Gen. Milroy was attacked by the whole of Lee's army and had to cut his way out by night with immense loss, they were near being captured with their treasure of three hundred thousand dollars. They succeeded in eluding the Confederates, and the funds were safely returned to Washington, at night, by special train, the second division of 8th Army Corps thus losing their pay for the time being. The following year, 1863, they were ordered to report at Harrisburg, to Col. W. M. Wylie, where they remained, paying discharged soldiers, until they were mustered out of the service; they paid out twelve million dollars, and within one year afterward their accounts were adjusted and settled to the entire satisfaction of the United States authorities. In January, 1866, Mr. Wilson returned to Clarion, and, having determined to settle there permanently, erected for his family a

costly and beautiful residence on the most eligible site in the town, opposite the public square. The following year he resumed the active practice of his profession, and from that time his success was phenomenal. His business rapidly accumulated, and soon, as the court records show, attained proportions exceeding that of all other lawyers in the neighborhood, necessitating the employment of several law clerks, he having more cases than all the members of the local Bar combined. In the Common Pleas Court alone the appearances on the docket were more than twelve hundred cases annually, while in every other branch of the law he held the same proportion.

In 1872, Mr. Wilson formed a co-partnership with George A. Jenks, of Brookville (afterward Assistant Secretary of the Interior and Solicitor-General of the United States), under the firm name of Wilson & Jenks, to which, later, John W. Reed, Esq., was admitted, which continued until dissolved on the election of Mr. Wilson as president judge of the Eighteenth Judicial District. During the existence of this partnership the firm stood at the head of the profession in Western Pennsylvania. They were employed in many important cases, their services being in demand both within and without the district. The discovery and production of petroleum in large quantities greatly augmented their business. As an instance of this it may be mentioned that from one bank in the county, which had sufficed for a number of years, seven more were organized and doing business, and Wilson, Jenks & Reed were attorneys for seven out of these eight institutions. They were recognized universally as safe counselors, experienced in their profession, always accessible, and ready to attend to the interests of their clients. The practice of the firm in the supreme court of the State was large and important, and embraced many cases outside of their own district. The United States Courts at Pittsburg also received a share of their attention. It was seen with appreciation that all cases undertaken by them received the most careful and methodical attention, even to the minutest details, a fact which resulted in gaining the entire confidence of the business public. Mr. Jenks took part in all jury trials, being seldom at the office except during such trials, the regular and special terms of court and argument courts. The reputation of the firm for quick incisiveness of understanding was remarkable. No client found it necessary to give them instructions about getting cases ready for trial; neglect was never imputed to them; their office papers were always models of neatness and accuracy. The late Jus-

tice Trunkey of the supreme court, presiding at a special court in Clarion, remarked that nowhere in the State had he found the standard of excellence up to the manners and forms of practice adopted and in use by the firm of Wilson, Jenks & Reed. A rigid adherence to the rules of court and practice established for them a record quite exceptional. With regard to their ability, probity, fidelity to their clients, and kindred qualities, the well-known record of this firm speaks more emphatically than could any ordinary words of eulogy. During the continuance of this co-partnership, Mr. Wilson was engaged in extensive outside business transactions, for which his early education and experience gave him exceptional advantages. In company with a practical man as partner, he bought five thousand acres of the best pine timber land in Clarion and Jefferson counties, and employed large numbers of men in manufacturing lumber. At first he attended simply to the financial part of the business, the purchase of supplies, etc., but finally bought out his partner and conducted the business alone for many years, adding to it the manufacture of coal boats for the transportation of bituminous coal from Pittsburg to New Orleans. He also held large interests in oil production, which he managed successfully. A big hearted, man, recognizing the value of the men who served him, his relations with them were always kindly and congenial, and it is a remarkable fact in his life that he never had a lawsuit with one of his employees. Generous as well as just in all his dealings with men, his benevolence was proverbial. His purse was always open to any charitable object and his name led the subscription lists for Church and other charities with the largest sum. One simple but most thoughtful instance of his character in this regard, out of many that may never be known, may be properly given here. Hearing of the sudden and imperative need of the people of a neighboring town, which had been destroyed by fire, he sent to each of more than fifty families, a barrel of flour, a munificent gift, the adequacy and wisdom of which will be readily conceded. Being a Republican in a Democratic county, giving a majority of usually eighteen hundred, Mr. Wilson had no opportunity for political preferment, though he controlled the State and Federal Republican patronage for more than twenty-five years, and generally either went a delegate to the Republican conventions or was represented in them by his friends. In 1882 he was specially selected to present to the Republican State convention the name of ex-Senator Greer, of Butler, as a candidate for Secretary of

Internal Affairs, who was nominated on the first ballot. In 1879 the Legislature passed a judicial apportionment bill, erecting Clarion into a separate judicial district. As soon as the bill passed the members of the Clarion Bar and the officers of the court, without distinction of party, in a strong petition to the governor recommended Mr. Wilson for appointment as president judge. No other name was presented. The bill, however, was afterward vetoed by Gov. Hoyt. In the last judicial apportionment, Clarion county was made a separate judicial district, it having more than forty thousand population required by the constitution. Jefferson county being contiguous and having less than forty thousand population, was attached to Clarion for judicial purposes, the two forming the 18th Judicial District. In the year 1881 an election for president judge was held in the 18th District. In Clarion county the Democrats nominated James B. Knox, and the Republicans unanimously nominated Theophilus S. Wilson; but as it was apparent to the political sagacity of Mr. Wilson that the Democratic nominee would certainly be elected, he declined to be a candidate, and the result proved the wisdom of his judgment, for Judge Knox was elected, his majority in Clarion county being over seventeen hundred. He was commissioned and entered upon his duties in January, 1882, and died in December, 1884. A successor was then appointed by the Democratic governor, Pattison, and served during 1885. At the next election he obtained a plurality vote at the primary meeting, after a vigorous contest. Meanwhile Mr. Wilson's name was presented, with his consent, before the Republican primary. As soon as it was known that he was willing to run, no other name being offered, he received the whole party vote at the primary meeting in Clarion county, and was unanimously declared the choice of the county convention. In Jefferson county no name was publicly announced except his, and when that county convention assembled he was the only candidate. On the day preceding the State convention the judicial district convention met in Jefferson county, and on the first ballot Mr. Wilson was made the nominee, and was the unanimous and unopposed choice of his party. In regard to this, many of Mr. Wilson's friends considered the nomination an empty honor in view of the preponderating Democratic strength in the district. But Mr. Wilson having entered the lists, was not there for defeat. Possessing remarkable political gifts, a skill in organization rarely equalled, and an energetic determination that filled his followers with enthusiasm, these qualities were at the service of his friends. The result was a campaign of

masterly ability, which succeeded in turning the vote to the extent of an average of fifty in every election district in Clarion county. The situation was deemed so important that the State organizations took an active part in the campaign, State Chairman Hensel sending Democratic speakers into the county, and State Chairman Cooper and United States Senator Quay aiding the Republican side with effective efforts. The returns surprised even the most sanguine supporters of the Republican candidate. Not only was Mr. Wilson elected, but, in a district frequently giving a Democratic majority of three thousand, stood a Republican majority of over four hundred—a phenomenal result that was the subject of the liveliest congratulations among the Republicans throughout the State. On the Bench Judge Wilson continued to have the same success and to hold the same exalted reputation that had accompanied him through all his professional experience. He soon became noted for the remarkable method and order which characterized his judicial work. His mind never wandered or was confused; his rulings of law were seldom questioned; his memory exhibited a rare tenacity; his industry was unflagging. It is said of him that where formerly many writs of error were taken annually from the Clarion courts to the supreme court, and many decisions reversed, during the first two years of Judge Wilson's term only two writs were taken, one in each year, and in each case his decision was affirmed. One of the cases thus appealed was the celebrated King homicide case, of which the Supreme Court said, in affirming it: "The assignments of error must all be dismissed, for the charge of the learned and able Judge was full and complete on every point, and we do not see how a better one could be framed." A man of fine presence and address, Judge Wilson was gifted with peculiar qualities for the acquisition and retention of the affection and esteem of those who knew him. Genial and frank in his manner, he was possessed of a dignity which made him an imposing figure in whatever society he entered. A thoroughly educated and highly cultured gentleman, he had also a bonhomie which rendered him strikingly attractive to his associates.

In 1859, Judge Wilson was married to Amanda Lowry, eldest daughter of William H. and Eliza Lowry, whose father was one of the most prominent citizens and merchants in Clarion county, and to the union were born five children: Edward M., Minnie, Harry R., Elizabeth and Theophilus L. Judge Wilson died while holding court for Judge White, at Indiana, Penn., July 6, 1891.