

History of the  
**ARMSTRONG FAMILY**  
from 980 to 1939 A.D.  
and Genealogy of  
**DAVID ARMSTRONG**  
and  
**SARAH HARRIS ARMSTRONG**  
1746 - 1939



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## **THOMAS ARMSTRONG IN PATH VALLEY, PENNA.**

We now come to our immediate ancestor, Thomas Armstrong, who, in 1764, with his wife Iasbella (surname not known) and at least two sons, William and David, came from Donegal County, Ireland and settled in Path Valley, Cumberland, now Franklin County, Pennsylvania. There he became the owner of considerable land situated on the west branch of Conococheauge Creek about eight miles above Fort Loudon on Pennsylvania Highway No. 75. (See foot note.)

Thomas Armstrong evidently was a descendant of Thomas Armstrong, the fifth Lord of Mangerton, who was the ancestor of the Armstrongs of the north of Ireland. He had lived in Donegal County, which joins Fermanaugh County, from whence John and Edward Armstrong emigrated in 1736 and settled in Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, very near to Path Valley. We believe this, together with the similarity of family names running through the records, to be very conclusive circumstantial evidence. John Armstrong here mentioned was a Major General in the Revolutionary War.

Thomas Armstrong died intestate about 1797, and William, his oldest son, and Joseph Armstrong settled the estate. (See Records in Chambersburg, Franklin County, Pa.)

The writer visited this farm in August, 1933, and again in October, 1938, and also consulted records in the Chambersburg Court House which disclose that the land had been purchased from Noah Abraham and is now in the name of James J. Hill.

## **THE HISTORY OF DAVID ARMSTRONG AND SARAH HARRIS**

David Armstrong born in Ireland in 1746, came to America with his parents, Thomas and Isabella, in 1764. He was married in 1779 to Sarah Harris, born in 1760, a daughter of Roland Harris, who resided at what is now Fort Loudon on the Lincoln Highway, at the foot of Path Valley. (See Harris History.)

He purchased 156 acres of land from his father on October 21, 1789. The deed, witnessed by James and John Armstrong,

was recorded in Chambersburg on June 17, 1790. David and Sarah sold this land on April 6, 1794. Their address was given as Fannett township.

In 1790 they, with their five children, George, Rebecca, Archibald, Thomas and Roland, migrated to Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, and located near the present site of Greensburg, where they remained until 1796. Their sixth child, Mary, was born there.

In 1795 the father and the two older children, George, age 15, and Rebecca, age 13, left the home east of the Allegheny River and crossed the country westward through the dense forests, where only at long distances a settler's cabin could be seen. They finally reached a point three miles west of the present town of Slippery Rock, Butler County, Pennsylvania, at the junction of Wolf Creek and Slippery Rock Creek, where they commenced the settlement of a 400 acre tract of land.

During the summer they erected a log cabin, where, in the fall, the two children were left when the father returned to Westmoreland County. The long winter nights must have been lonesome for these two children, as there were no near neighbors, and the forests in those early days were full of wild animals. Tradition says "the wolves came around the cabin and made the nights hideous with their angry howling."

Early in the spring of 1796 the remainder of the family came to the new home and succeeded in holding the 400 acres. Here the four younger children were born. The family remained together 'till, in the course of events, they were removed, the children by marriage and the parents by death.

The new home was founded in an unbroken forest and was located on what had been an Indian Camping ground; in fact the Indians were quite numerous and were on friendly terms with the new settlers; they were frequent visitors in the home, one writer has stated "the boys of the family particularly George, mingled with the Indians and became much attached to their customs and manner of life, and frequently joined in the chase with them."

The forest was full of wild animal life including deer, bears, wolves and panthers in addition to plenty of small game. One writer tells of a neighbor, Peggy Walker, being chased one evening while riding home from a visit at the Armstrongs; she was startled by the terrific scream of a panther which sprang from the bushes close by the path. Her horse was frightened and ran, the panther following but was unable to overtake the horse which was the swifter. She reached home in safety but was nearly overcome by fright.

We can scarcely visualize the primitive conditions surrounding our ancestors. They lacked nearly all the ordinary comforts of a home; they were without schools and churches; the roads were only trails through the forest; there were no bridges over the streams; the nearest store where they could procure necessary supplies was Pittsburgh, fifty or more miles away.

From tradition we learn the children met in some of the homes for private instruction. The first religious service was held under the trees near the present Presbyterian Church at Plain Grove early in July, 1799, by Rev. Elisha McCurdy, a missionary. At a second meeting, probably early in September, a movement was made to found a church and select a site for a building which was of logs and about 20x30 feet in size with no floor, puncheon seats and windows of oiled linen or of paper. The Church was heated by a large open fireplace; the pulpit was in one corner on a raised platform of puncheon and was also a split log.

We should ascribe highest praise to our ancestors for their courage in establishing a civilization under such unfavorable conditions for the record reveals that David Armstrong had a prominent place in the organizing and building of the first church in the community.

David Armstrong was a soldier in the Revolutionary War, having enlisted in the Cumberland County Militia in 1777 under the command of Col. James Dunlap in Capt. Noah Abraham's company. His record may be found in Penna. Archives Vol. 6, Page 86. He died March 20, 1811; Sarah, his wife, died February 3, 1816. They are buried in Presbyterian Church cemetery, Plain Grove, Lawrence Co., Penna. Their family consisted of six sons and four daughters, all married, the following outline shows name, date of birth, death and marriage.

George Armstrong, the first child born in Path Valley, settled on a forest tract of land about one and one half miles north of the present town of Slippery Rock near the short road to Grove City about 1805 or 1806. After clearing some fields and erecting a cabin he married, in 1807, Elizabeth McCune, a daughter of Thomas and Margaret McCune whose son James had married Rebecca Armstrong the preceding year.

Thomas McCune's will dated Feb. 15, 1802, and recorded in Huntingdon County, Pa., left one third of his estate to his wife, Margaret, and one-seventh of the remainder to each of his seven children.

George died on his farm August 27, 1830.

Rebecca Armstrong the second child at the age of 13 and her brother George, age 15, came with the father on horseback to the Slippery Rock locality in 1795 and helped to establish the new home. In view of what has already been described she certainly had a courage worthy of our highest admiration and emulation.

On Feb. 10, 1806, she became the second wife of Capt. James McCune whose first wife was Susanna Nelson who died April 15, 1805, leaving four children aged 8, 7, 5, and 2 years. Rebecca became the mother of seven children; her entire life was spent in the Plain Grove community, she died Jan. 4, 1854.

Archibald the 3rd child at the age of twenty-two married Elizabeth Wallace Oct. 8, 1807. He obtained 50 acres of land from the North East corner of the home farm where six of his nine children were born. In 1825 he removed to the Wallace farm in Mercer County. In 1831 he purchased the farm near Plain Grove which has been the "Home farm" for more than a hundred years, now owned by a grandson Robert Armstrong. Archibald died June 18, 1869. Elizabeth reached the age of 100 years, two months and four days, died Dec. 12, 1838.

Thomas the 4th child came to the new home at the age of nine and spent the remainder of his life here. Upon the death of his father March 20, 1811, he then being just past twenty-three years of age, became the head of the family because his older brothers had already been married. Roland the 5th child had been apprenticed to his uncle Roland Harris a tanner three years previous. The family now consisted of his mother aged 51 years and five children aged 16, 13, 11, 8 and 4 respectively. The mother died five years later.

Thomas remained single until all the others except Elizabeth had married, he then at the age of 37 wooed and married (Dec. 18, 1824) Frances Drake, a beautiful girl 13

years his junior, a daughter of Moses Drake and a granddaughter of Samuel Drake, a soldier of the Revolutionary War.

Thomas received from his father's estate the homestead where he died April 3, 1860; Frances, his wife, died in Kansas October 3, 1875.

Roland the 5th child born Feb. 23, 1790, was apprenticed to his uncle Roland Harris of Franklin County, Pa., in 1808. After completing his trade he returned to his home and assisted his brother-in-law James McCune to erect and operate a tannery. On June 16, 1816, he married Jane Donnell, a daughter of John Donnell, a prosperous farmer of Cannonsburg, Washington County, Pa. About this time he moved to Painesville, Ohio, where he engaged in the tanning business on his own account for about nine years. He then returned to the home community and erected a carding and fulling plant. In 1835, with his wife and six children, he removed to Allegheny City (now Pittsburgh) where he died March 8, 1864.

Mary the 6th child born June 15, 1795, married Alexander McBride May 25, 1820. They purchased a farm near Londen, Mercer County, where they resided four years. They then purchased a part of the old home farm where Mary died April 21, 1847. Alexander died Oct. 14, 1878.

David the 7th child born March 25, 1798, learned the Stone Mason trade; was married January 21, 1821, to Jane Jack. They resided in New Bedford, Lawrence County, for ten years, then returned to Butler County and purchased a farm where he died December 31, 1840. Jane died July 4, 1842.

Ann Armstrong the 8th child born September 10, 1800, married Samuel Jack January 11, 1821. He was born February 26, 1798, and died April 9, 1845. Ann died August 17, 1848.

Samuel Armstrong the 9th child born June 28, 1803, married twice—first, Jane Irwin, Nov. 16, 1825, she was born Jan. 13, 1801, and died Sept. 1, 1840. Samuel then married Nancy Robb Loveland, June 1, 1843.

The first wife was mother to two sons and three daughters.

The second wife was mother to three daughters.

Samuel died Feb. 20, 1853.

Elizabeth Armstrong the 10th child born Jan. 6, 1807, was the last in the family of ten to marry which occurred Dec. 31, 1829, five years after the marriage of Thomas with whom she had made her home.

She married William McNees who was born Jan. 11, 1807, their home was near Jacksville, Butler Co., where he died Sept. 12, 1856. Elizabeth remained a widow for nearly 32 years, having died April 7, 1888, at the home of a daughter, Mary Jane Bennett.

## THE HARRIS FAMILY

The only history of the Harris family available starts with John Harris, Sr., a native of Yorkshire, England, born in 1673. At his majority he came to America with several brothers. He spent several years in Philadelphia. With one or two of his brothers, he entered the trade with the Indians in 1705. He was married twice. The name of his first wife is not known. She was the mother of seven children. The second wife was Esther Say, an English lady. Prior to 1725 he made an attempt to settle on the Susquehanna near the present site of Bainbridge, but in 1726 he moved to the Indian village of Paixton, now Paxtang, near the present city of Harrisburg, where he established a trading post and a ferry. He died in December, 1748, and is buried with his first wife in what is now Harris Park on the bank of the river in the city of Harrisburg. He was the first settler west of the Conewago hills.

John Harris, Jr., was the son of John Harris, Sr., and was the first white child born in Pennsylvania west of the Conewago hills at the present site of Harrisburg in 1726.

When but a young man, John Harris, Jr., was occasionally employed by the province of Pennsylvania to transact business with the Indians at a critical period.

His house was frequented by the Indians. Several important conferences were held there between the several tribes on the Susquehanna and the Ohio and the Government of Pennsylvania.

Prior to 1754 he had been sent on an Indian mission to Ohio, and at the same time to notice the most practicable route from his ferry (Harris' ferry) to Logstown (now known as Ambridge), below the area which is now the city of Pittsburgh. Having accepted an Indian agency, he was faithful to his charge, both to the Indians and to the Government. The latter he kept constantly informed of what was going on in the frontier settlements, for at this time many of the Indians on the Ohio had taken up the hatchet against the English.

He was a great patriot. When the independence was agi-

tated, he thought the declaration premature, but when independence was declared, he advanced three thousand pounds to carry on the contest.

He was a man of more than ordinary forecast. He understood the advantages of Harris' ferry. Twenty years before he had laid out Harrisburg, he observed to Judge Hallenback that his place would become a place of central business and the seat of the Government of Pennsylvania.

When he laid out Harrisburg in 1785, he conveyed, with other property, to the commissioners four acres of ground on Capital Hill in trust for public use. He also gave lot No. 185 on the corner of Chestnut and Third Streets to the German Reformed and Lutherans in 1787 to erect a church thereon.

After a life of usefulness, he closed his eventful period on July 29, 1791, and his remains rest in the Paxton churchyard, near Harrisburg.

It might be interesting to note that the route John Harris, Jr., selected to Logstown is almost identical with the national route familiar to most of us as the William Penn Highway. Also, some of the same family later founded the town of Harrisville, Butler County, Pennsylvania.

Roland Harris, father of Sarah Harris Armstrong, died March 1797, whose ancestors founded Harrisburg, settled in Path Valley at the present town of Fort Loudon in 1762. His first wife, Rebecca, died April 4, 1772. His second wife, Elizabeth, died in 1809. The children of the first wife were James, Richard, Hannah, Sarah and Roland. The children of his second wife were Ephriam, Joseph and Mary. Ephriam founded Harrisville, Butler County, Pennsylvania.

## CONCLUSION

In submitting this record of our family the writer is convinced that we should not be unduly sensitive over the fact that our ancestors on the "Border" were freebooters.

History reveals that this region was practically without religious services of any character prior to the "Reformation" in the 16th Century. We should have a feeling of pride and admiration that they survived the hardships and clan wars for hundreds of years but finally were brought under the influence of non-conforming Presbyterian Ministers and emerged as a Christian family.

One historian refers to them as a "Wonderful Race," we



agree with his estimate, they indeed were, and still are a wonderful race; not because of their physical strength or military prowess, but because of their high moral character.

History is defined as "a record of event" but the mere recital of events is of minor importance in the affairs of a family, a community or of a Nation, we should be and are more interested in the effect or results of events.

When we appraise the rugged characteristics of our forebearers we are assured they were men and women of decisive convictions, they may have had their faults, their failures, their crudities but we display a lack of appreciation when we fail to recognize their greatness. They were men and women who left their impress for good upon the communities and institutions wherever they resided.

We have found Armstrongs serving in prominent positions in our early state and national history. They served because they believed in freedom and were willing to sacrifice for it, they served without the blare of trumpets or the heralding to the press agent. They served but without boasting of it. They toiled to make better living conditions for themselves and for us, their children, not that they might have honor of men; they had as their motto "Invectus Maneo" (I remain unconquered) this motto should be an inspiration for us to carry on with renewed courage ever ready to suffer, if need be, for the right, so that when we pass of the stage of action and have joined the great host whose name we bear generations yet unborn may venerate the motto "Invectus Maneo."

I close with the words of Edmund Burke the Irish philosopher and politician (1730-1797) "People will not look forward to posterity who do not look backward to their ancestors."

Thomas Elmer Armstrong,  
Pittsburgh, Pa.

Grandson of Thomas Armstrong, 4th Family.

## FAMILY OF DAVID AND SARAH HARRIS ARMSTRONG

Name	Born	Died	Date Married	Name of Wife or Husband	Born	Died
3. George Armstrong .....	11-2-1780	8-28-1830	1807	Elizabeth McCune .....	3-24-1776	8-4-1848
4. Rebecca Armstrong .....	5-17-1782	1-4-1854	3-10-1806	Capt. James McCune .....	5-7-1771	4-6-1825
5. Archibald Armstrong .....	3-6-1785	6-18-1869	10-8-1807	Elizabeth Wallace .....	10-8-1788	12-12-1888
6. Thomas Armstrong .....	8-27-1787	4-3-1860	12-18-1824	Frances Drake .....	3-22-1800	10-3-1875
7. Roland Armstrong .....	2-23-1790	5-17-1864	6-16-1816	Jane Donnel .....	1794	4-27-1843
8. Mary Armstrong .....	6-15-1795	4-21-1847	5-25-1820	Alex McBride .....	12-20-1795	10-14-1878
9. David Armstrong .....	3-26-1798	12-31-1840	1-11-1821	Jane Jack .....	5-23-1800	7-4-1842
10. Ann Armstrong .....	8-10-1800	8-19-1848	1-11-1821	Samuel Jack .....	2-26-1798	4-9-1845
11. Samuel Armstrong .....	1-28-1803	2-20-1853	11-10-1826 6-1-1843	Jane Irwin .....	1-13-1801	4-1-1840
				Nancy Robb Loveland ...	6-1-1843	
12. Elizabeth Armstrong .....	1-6-1807	4-7-1888	12-31-1829	William McNees .....	1-11-1807	4-12-1856