

Old and New Westmoreland

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Born March 20, 1840, on the old Shepler homestead in Rostraver township, Westmoreland county, Pennsylvania, Isaac Hill Shepler, the youngest child of Joseph and Mary (Blackburn) Shepler, passed the years of his childhood and early youth in his father's home. It was at the local public schools of the county that the elementary portion of his education was received, but he was later sent to the Ames Commercial School at Syracuse, New York, and it was from this well known institution that he was graduated, June 4, 1866. He then returned to the parental home and there remained until after his marriage, when he rented the farm adjoining the homestead and there carried on agricultural operations during the four years following. He then removed to a property owned by his brother-in-law at Webster, in the neighborhood, consisting of a tract of two hundred and seventy acres, where he spent a similar term, also assisting in the management of the home farm. During the last year of this period he was unfortunate enough to receive a severe sunstroke which rendered him unfit for hard work during the better part of a year, during which time he made his home at a point near Fell's Church, in Rostraver township. Believing that he could completely recover his health and strength in the West, Mr. Shepler then journeyed to the Dakotas and there remained for two years, during which time he was employed

on the Coulson mercantile boats which had extensive government contracts in that part of the country, as well as Nebraska and Montana. He travelled extensively throughout the northwestern part of the United States, but in 1881 returned to the East and once more took up his abode in Westmoreland county, Pennsylvania. Upon his return he located on the Caldwell property in Rostraver township, where he farmed for two years.

It was not until the year 1883 that Mr. Shepler finally gave up farming altogether and turned his attention to the business with which he has been so closely associated ever since. In that year he came to North Belle Vernon and there purchased a one-quarter interest in the Belle Vernon Saw and Planing Mill Company, and at once took active charge of most of its business affairs, acting as bookkeeper, contractor and buyer for the company for a term of four years. At the end of that period he was offered the position of gauger for the United States Government in that region by President Cleveland, who had just come into office. This position he accepted and at once entered into the discharge of his difficult duties, spending considerable time at the famous Gibson distillery. This was not the first time that Mr. Shepler had held an official post, as a number of years prior to this he had acted as storekeeper for the government at Brownstown for about eight months, during Andrew Johnson's administration, but had been succeeded by another man at the change in administrations. As gauger Mr. Shepler served for four years and one month and afterwards returned to civil and mercantile life. In 1890 he purchased the business of P. Rider & Company, who had conducted a store in Belle Vernon for a considerable period so that he was well established there. From that time until his retirement from active life in 1916, Mr. Shepler continued uninterruptedly to conduct this establishment with the highest degree of success and gradually built up for himself a reputation as a capable and honorable business man second to none in the region. Once he changed the location of the store, the occasion of this move being the expiration of the lease of the building which he had taken over from Mr. Rider, originally with the business. He had then erected a business building on a hill on his own property and there established his general store, which has come to play so important a part in the mercantile life of the community. The period in which he was thus actively engaged lasted in all some twenty-six years, and there are few people in Belle Vernon who have not traded at one time or another in the old establishment.

From what has already been said concerning Mr. Shepler's public offices, it will be realized that he was a staunch Democrat in his politics. It has, therefore, been all the more a tribute to his personal popularity and to the confidence reposed in him by his fellow-citizens, that, in a district so strongly Republican, he should have been elected again and again to various local offices. Among these should be mentioned those of Burgess, assessor, president of the Board of Health, school director and many others, in all of which he conducted himself and discharged his duties to the entire satisfaction of the community, without regard to its politics. For almost half a century he has served as a member of the Democratic town committee and has always made himself most active in advancing the interests of the party in whose principles and policies he has so strongly believed, and yet has not antagonized his fellow-townsmen of the contrary opinion. In his religious belief Mr. Shepler is a Presbyterian, although brought up in the Methodist church, and is now an active member of the Presbyterian church of Belle Vernon, giving liberally of both time and fortune to its affairs, and for some fifty years singing in its choir. In the year 1862 Mr. Shepler became a Free Mason, joining at that time Gummert Lodge, No. 252, Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, of Fayette City, which was organized at that time, so that he is one of the charter members. He is now a member of the chapter and council of Belle Vernon. Mr. Shepler finds his chief recreation in the sports of hunting and fishing and each autumn finds him spending a vacation in this manner. Indeed

the whole of the great out-of-doors and the free life associated with it appeals very strongly to him and dates from the time when he was in the West and sailed up and down the Missouri river on the Coulson steamers. This line, which was partly owned by his brother-in-law, Captain Martin Coulson, was one of the pioneer enterprises in that part of the country, and the vessels plied between Yankton and Fort Benton when the country was overrun with Indians and the West was indeed wild. During those days Mr. Shepler came into close contact with all the wild things of the great western plains and mountains, seeing Indians by the thousands and the great herds of buffalo which at that time roamed at will through the land. These, as well as antelope and deer of various kinds, he hunted and the life made of him a confirmed sportsman with an unalterable love for his rod and gun. Mr. Shepler recalls one remarkable adventure experienced by him in those days, when the boat upon which he was making the usual trip passed through a herd of buffalo which was crossing the river of which the numbers were so great that, even in that flat country, the line extended in both directions beyond the range of vision. It was one of the great creatures' migratory movements and nothing could turn them from their course. Along a river invisible because of the countless herds through the surging and snorting beasts, the boat made its passage slowly, but there was hump steak that night for all hands.