

TWENTIETH CENTURY HISTORY  
OF  
CLEARFIELD COUNTY  
PENNSYLVANIA  
AND  
REPRESENTATIVE CITIZENS

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BY  
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*"Study History, for it is Philosophy Teaching by Example"*

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gained a foothold. He was painstaking, conscientious and untiring, and when he got a case he prepared it with a care that soon attracted attention, and his practice began to increase. Many prominent lawyers then practiced at the Clearfield bar, among them Andrew G. Curtin, Judges Hale, Linn and the younger Burnside, and the class of cases he was engaged in were mostly ejectment suits which were of such importance that the parties to the litigation had the means to employ the best talent. Attrition with strong minds and the character of the litigation rapidly developed his force as a lawyer and gave him a large practice.

When Senator Wallace went to Clearfield he pursued his studies as best he could in the schools of the place, but no opportunity was afforded him to gain more than a fairly good English education and the rudiments of the classics. He began the study of law when a little more than sixteen years of age in his father's office and helped to support himself by doing clerical work in the offices of the prothonotary, sheriff, treasurer and commissioners of the county. He applied himself with great earnestness to work and study, and his employment in the county offices gave him a knowledge of titles and surveys which was of great value to him after he was admitted to the bar, as the bulk of the cases in that county were ejectment suits and other litigation growing out of disputed titles to land and lines of survey.

During this time, however, he devoted himself to the study of law, and by hard work he

The hard work required and his close application told upon his health, so that in 1862 he accepted the nomination of the Democrats for the State Senate as a relief from the drudgery of his practice and in the hope that the change of scene and action might benefit him. His opponent was the then speaker of the State Senate, and a recognized leader of his party. A sharply-contested fight followed. Mr. Wallace was successful mainly through the increased majority given him in his own county. His election to the State Senate gave the Democrats a majority of one on joint ballot, and his vote made Charles R. Buckalew United States Senator. For fifteen years after his first election he was returned to the Senate, and, notwithstanding the bitter assaults that were made upon his political action, at each election he ran ahead of his ticket in his own county. He went to Harrisburg with merely a local reputation; but he soon made his name known throughout the whole state, and in a very few years it was known throughout the whole country.

So rapidly did Mr. Wallace develop into a

power in his party that in 1865 he was, without his consent, made chairman of its State Central Committee. He found the Democracy split and demoralized, and at once addressed himself to the work of organization, in which he developed unusual tact and ability. The majority against his party in 1865 and 1866 was under twenty thousand, but in 1867 Judge Sharswood was the candidate for Supreme Court judge and Mr. Wallace at the head of the State Committee conducted such an adroit and noiseless canvass that the Republican candidate was defeated. In 1868 the most memorable canvass of his career as a political manager was made. Seymour and Blair were the candidates for the Presidency and Vice-Presidency against Grant and Colfax. The October election in Pennsylvania was the pivotal contest, and the issue was made and fully tested there. He not only gave his party a splendid organization, but good heart, and brought it to the polls in such excellent working condition that the Democratic candidate, C. E. Boyle, was defeated by less than ten thousand votes in the October election. A change of less than one per cent would have reversed the decision. Even with the prestige of Grant's name and popularity his majority was less than twenty-nine thousand at the Presidential election. The contest that year in Pennsylvania was one of the bitterest ever known in the history of the politics of the state and the Democratic party under the leadership of Mr. Wallace was in better condition than for many years before or perhaps since that time.

His career in the State Senate was that of a leader. For almost the whole of his term of service he occupied prominent positions upon the important committees of finance, judiciary

and apportionment, and his learning as a lawyer and his force as a business man, gave him great opportunities of serving the people in a non-partisan way, and of shaping judicious legislation. His personal record there was above reproach, and his influence was unexcelled by that of any of the body. In 1871, his party having obtained control of the Senate, he was chosen Speaker thereof; and demonstrated in that place his fairness and impartiality, as well as his admirable skill as a parliamentarian. In the winter of 1874, the one prior to that in which Mr. Wallace was elected United States Senator, the Legislature was engaged in framing the acts necessary to carry into effect the provisions of the new constitution. To this work Mr. Wallace earnestly addressed himself, and much of the important legislation of that session bears the impress of his mind.

The general act of incorporation, which is regarded as one of the best of the kind on the statute books of any State in the country, was his work, and the law regulating and classifying cities and providing for their debts also came from his hand. The act of 1883 providing for arbitration of labor disputes, which was first enacted in the United States and was purely tentative in its character, was the work of his hand, and the change in the general railroad law of that session, which gave much more liberality to their construction, was also largely aided by him.

In the election of 1874 his party had secured control of the legislature on joint ballot, and by common consent Mr. Wallace was turned to by his party as its candidate for the United States Senate. In the few years that had elapsed since he walked into the Senate chamber a pale, delicate and almost unknown

young man, he had outstripped many Democratic leaders of less force, but more pretensions. Of course, several prominent leaders of his party, were candidates for the nomination for United States Senator, but it did not need the expression of the Democrats in the Legislature to show that Mr. Wallace was the choice of two-thirds of them. So pronounced was the feeling in his favor that long before the Legislature met the question was practically settled, and when the Democratic caucus met there were only sixteen votes out of 121 cast for all the opposing candidates.

Mr. Wallace took his seat in the Senate of the United States on the 4th of March, 1875, and almost immediately assumed a leading position in the national councils of his party. His reputation as a man of political force, gained by practical service in Pennsylvania, followed him in the broader work at the capital of the Republic, and he had been in the Senate but a very short time before his judgment was sought and his advice taken upon all matters of party management. During his term in the Senate he served upon the important committees of finance, appropriations and foreign relations. At the time when the Democrats drifted towards division, Mr. Wallace was of great service to his party in inducing it to take conservative action upon leading questions and in tempering and controlling the bitterness of opposing factions. In all the political events transpiring during his six years at the National Capital, Mr. Wallace held a foremost place, and, although antagonized at every step by his rivals for leadership in the State, he maintained his position and almost universally scored a victory over his adversaries.

In 1872 he was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention at Baltimore and

chairman of the delegation, and voted against Horace Greeley and for Judge Black, but followed his party in supporting Greeley for the Presidency after his nomination.

In 1874 he presided over the convention of his party at Pittsburg, one of the most important of its history. It was so impartially controlled and the order maintained was so exemplary that it exerted much influence in winning the Legislature for the Democracy in the then succeeding election. In 1876 he was again a delegate to the St. Louis National Convention and again was chairman of the delegation. In 1880 he was influential at Cincinnati in securing the nomination of General Hancock to the Presidency, although he declined to go upon the delegation. In 1884 he was upon the delegation to Chicago, but, declining any of the official places in the delegation he was directed by it to present the name of Mr. Randall as the candidate of Pennsylvania. He did this in such a spirit of broad-minded fairness, and so forcibly and eloquently, that his brief speech was declared to be the oratorical gem of the occasion.

Mr. Wallace's career as a lawyer is as eminent as his record as a politician. Starting without opportunities or influential friends he rapidly rose to a prominent place among the leaders of the bar of the State. While serving in the Senate, he did not neglect his legal work. During the labor troubles in the Clearfield region, he took a judicious and equitable part between the coal operators and the striking miners. Although counsel for the Commonwealth and the coal operators, he was never violent in his denunciation of the workman. In the great trial which took place at Clearfield, when the leaders of the labor strikes were arrested for conspiracy and the question

of the organization and conduct of the labor unions was up for judicial investigation, Mr. Wallace was counsel for the coal operators in their actions against the miners. The late Senator Matt Carpenter, Judge Hughes, of Pottsville, and other eminent lawyers, defended the action of the labor union. Judge Orvis presided and the trial was a long and desperately fought legal battle.

John Siney, the head of the labor unions, was acquitted because no overt act could be proved against him, but Xingo Parkes and other prominent labor unionists were convicted and sent to the penitentiary. Mr. Wallace interposed in behalf of the convicted men and urged upon the court the utmost clemency. He took the ground that the moral effect of the conviction of the leading strikers was greater than a harsh execution of the law. In all the many labor troubles that have occurred in Clearfield county, Mr. Wallace has taken a prominent part as assistant counsel to the law officers of the county. He has also represented the large coal operators in that region, and by his judicious advice and discreet interposition between contending forces, law and order have been very well preserved, and never have troops been called into the county to preserve the peace, as they have in nearly every other mining district in Pennsylvania. In the labor riots in 1877, as in all others that have occurred in the Clearfield region, Mr. Wallace's action and advice were effective and all important. He took a judicious ground between the workmen and the operators. He held that the men had the right to strike, but no right to prevent others working, and the quiet but firm position assumed by the operators and authorities under his advice prevented bloodshed and restored order

in the region. The result of his attitude is best displayed by the fact that since 1877 there has no violence attended any of the strikes in all that region.

The qualities of mind that Mr. Wallace early exhibited specially fitted him for dealing with the delicate questions which this condition of things imposed. He was always noted for great courage, tact and good judgment. Untiring energy and tenacity are among his striking characteristics, and his powers of endurance and capacity for work were simply remarkable.

The case of *Turner vs. the Commonwealth*, reported in *Fifth Norris*, gives a fair illustration of the tenacity of purpose with which Mr. Wallace fought his legal battles and followed a trail in spite of all obstacles. He was counsel for defense, and feeling ran high against his client, who was convicted of murder in the first degree and sentenced to be hung. Mr. Wallace took the case to the Supreme Court and his argument for a reversal of the judgment of the lower court is regarded as one of the strongest ever delivered before that tribunal. It was also a successful one, for the decision of the court was reversed and a new trial ordered. He secured a change of venue from Clearfield to Clinton county and the case was retired. The Commonwealth was struck in one of its weakest points, and after one of the most dramatic scenes ever witnessed in a court room in Central Pennsylvania, his client was acquitted. Mr. Wallace had given three years of hard work to the case and illustrated in a striking manner those qualities of mind and body that brought him fortune and fame.

In those branches of the law most useful in the development of an astute and deep legal mind, Senator Wallace was greatly proficient.

The trial of ejectment on original title is one of those branches. This field has given to the legal profession, in the last half century, its strongest minds. Chief Justices Woodward, Thompson, Black and Agnew graduated in this school and fitted themselves for their high duties by work at the bar and on the local bench. The records of the Supreme Court, in many of its cases, show the impress of Mr. Wallace's mind upon the creation of a system of law applicable to and resulting from titles, surveys and patents. *Hagerty vs. Mathers*, reported in 5th Casey, and again in 1st Wright, is an example of this class of cases. One of the most noted of these cases was the celebrated Houtz ejectment, involving the location of the tracts of land upon which Houtzdale is built and perhaps 10,000 people live. His position and theories as to the true location were finally vindicated, after three trials in as many different courts, and his clients were successful. Governor Beaver and ex-Solicitor General Jenks were his antagonists in the last trial of the case, and it is no reflection on them to say that they were unsuccessful both in the court below and in the Supreme Court.

After leaving the Senate Mr. Wallace devoted himself to bringing returns from his large landed estate, which had been neglected during his official life. In his later years he did more to develop the bituminous coal interests of the Clearfield region than had ever been done before, and he reaped the reward of his industry and enterprise. The projection of the Beech Creek Railroad as a branch of the Reading System, and a competitive factor in the transportation of the coal seeking an eastward market, was one of the agencies of this work. It is a financial success and has

greatly enhanced the value of the coal lands of the section it traverses. While not connected with the machinery of its operation, he was its president from the beginning. Upon the branches of the Pennsylvania system traversing his county he had also large interests, and constantly aided in developing new fields and giving employment to labor upon new and needed extensions.

As years came to him, the asperities that result from the political action of an aggressive man, seemed to grow softer, and broader views and milder thoughts took their place. From being somewhat partisan and bitter as a speaker, he became conservative and thoughtful of the future of the people. His first appearance at a State convention since 1880 was in 1887, when he was called to preside. The views of his party's policy he then presented are well known to have been his own earnest convictions, and those of us who knew him well, know that no prouder trophy could have been his than to have engrafted on the organic law of the State reform looking to the growth of intelligence among her people and elevating the standard of their morals and public purity.

It is but natural that a man of his strength of character, habits and disposition and one who bore such a conspicuous part in shaping political controversies, should have been assailed and criticised. It is to his credit that he had many bitter enemies, and still more to his honor that he was able to meet them with success and to rise to eminence by sheer force of character, energy and ability.

From another source we take the following in regard to this eminent lawyer and citizen:

"August 30, 1847. On reading the certificate of Josiah W. Smith, George R. Barrett

and John F. Weaver, board of examiners, and on motion of George R. Barrett, William A. Wallace, Esq., was admitted to practice as an attorney of Clearfield county and was sworn, etc.,

William C. Welsh, Prothy. (Continuance Docket No. 6, page 161.)

"He was then 19 years and 9 months old. His first case was entered on September 2, 1847, 3 days after his admission, as follows:

James Brothers vs. Andrew Barnhart  
No. 33, August Term, 1847. Transcript from Docket of James McMurray, of judgment \$14.30. Int. 19 Aug. 1846. Entered Sept. 2, 1847.

"He was distinguished from everybody else who has ever practiced law here in these respects: He was more aggressive and persistent and industrious. To these qualities he added a wonderfully quick apprehension and a comprehensive grasp of his whole case which he never relaxed until he accomplished his purpose. Long before I knew him or any of the other men who practiced here I asked my father what there was about him which gave him such a reputation over everybody else. He said that he got all the points in his case, that he omitted nothing; when I came to know him afterwards I thought this was a pretty good summary of what distinguished him in the trial of a case.

"No man can practice law to any considerable extent without having occasions which will test the kind of a man he is. A lawyer does his work publicly under the direction and supervision of the court and under the glaring criticism of other members of the Bar who may be either arrayed against him in the particular case, or whose sympathies for some reason may be opposed to him. In most other

employments a man may measurably conceal his action and motives but not so in law. These remarks are suggested by an experience Senator Wallace had in the summer of 1875. A most serious difficulty in protecting property in a conflict between the coal operators and their employes was encountered in this county. A large number of men were arrested charged with riot and conspiracy. The first trial occurred on the 7th of June and the second trial against the same defendants on the 28th of September, each of them occupying a week or more and each of them resulting in a verdict of guilty. The two most noted defendants were known as Siney and Parks. They had a State reputation, if not a National reputation, for their identity with labor organizations. Senator Wallace aided only by Judge Krebs, then quite a young man, conducted the prosecutions on the part of the defendants. There was perhaps the most noted array of counsel for the defense we have ever had in this county. Matt Carpenter, then United States Senator, and with a National reputation as a great lawyer, Frank Hughes, who had been at the head of the Schuylkill county Bar for perhaps 50 years, and Linn Bartholomew, the most noted jury lawyer in that section, appeared with Judge Barrett and Walter Barrett on the part of the defense. William M. McCullough told me that he had asked Senator Wallace if he realized the effect that his prosecution of these cases would have upon his political future. Without a moment's hesitation, the Senator said to him, that he had no fear whatever from any such source, that this was an occasion that required of a lawyer *moral* courage, and that he proposed to assume the responsibility of doing his duty as he understood it.

“This generation understands very poorly how much we are indebted to the course taken by Senator Wallace at that time. We have never had either before or since such a crisis as occurred at that time—35 years ago. W. R. McPherson was sheriff. Wallace prepared his proclamation, which was issued and scattered broadcast throughout the county. He repudiated the idea that it was necessary to call for State troops, and acted upon the assumption that the police power of this county was adequate to compel obedience to the laws. There was perhaps never an instance when a lawyer of ability and experience, and with a large following in the county, had a better opportunity to perform a great public and professional duty, and no man ever did perform such a duty more courageously and fearlessly than did Senator Wallace. It was a service similar to that which Franklin B. Gowan performed when he prosecuted to a finish the leaders of the Molly Maguires in Schuylkill county, and similar also to the great public service which was performed by Grover Cleveland on a larger scale in suppressing the labor riots in Chicago and aiding in the conviction of those who with red hands had trampled upon the rights of both liberty and property.”