

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES.

Old Settlers.

HON. SAMUEL. R. LEWIS.

Samuel Richards Lewis, a justly honored citizen of Fall River, in this county, by reason of his long residence in this region of country and his public services; having been constantly and effectively identified with the growth and prosperity of La Salle County for many years; twice her senator at the State Capitol and twice entrusted with the responsibilities of her treasurership, and in every public trust having been a most faithful steward, deserves the gratitude of her people, and has it fully, together with the warm personal friendship of everyone with whom he has come in contact. He belongs to a family of old quakers: "friends" who flourished away back in the days of William Penn. Here is what he has discovered of his immediate ancestors: After informing us that he was born Jan. 12. 1818, in Washington, Pa. and that his father, Jehu Lewis, was born in Loudon County, Va, in a memorandum made by himself in 1876, he says:

ANCESTRAL HISTORY

"Living the most of my life in the west, I have known but little of my ancestors. In the year 1853 an elderly gentleman by the name of Samuel Lewis, who is a distant relative of mine, called upon me. He imparted to me much information in regard to my family. He stayed but a few days, and I was sorry afterwards that I had not made a memorandum of what he told me. In 1875, he dropped in again and I received such facts as were known to him of my family. He (my visitor) was born and reared near Philadelphia, knew much of my ancestors, and has the record for what he states, He said: Henry Lewis (the 1st) emigrated from Wales, in Great Britain, in 1682. He

brought with him his father and a son, Henry (the 2nd). An early history of Delaware Co., Pa, speaks of this man as the friend and correspondent of Wm Penn, the eminent quaker philanthropist of England, who gave his name to the Keystone state, Pennsylvania, and who about that time was frequently in Philadelphia. The same history mentions that he (Henry Lewis 1st) was foreman of the first grand jury ever organized in Philadelphia. Henry Lewis (2nd) was married in 1693. Another son, John, was born in 1695. Another of his children, Evan Lewis, was the head of the Philadelphia and Chest Co. branch of the Lewis family, comprising among them, Enoch Lewis, a distinguished philanthropist and mathematician, who died in 1857, also Jospeh J. Lewis, Enoch's son, who was President Lincoln's commissioner of internal revenue, then and afterwards at the head of the legal profession of Pennsylvania. He was also a delegate from Pennsylvania to the Chicago convention which nominated Lincoln, and one of the committee who was sent to appraise him officially of his nomination. Another son was Edward Lewis, connected with the Bloomington, IL., Pantograph. Another son of said John Lewis was Samuel Lewis, my visiting relatives father. And was born in 1730, and lived a short time in Virginia, where my father, Jehu Lewis, was born, the youngest of a large family, in 1779. My grandfather, Samuel, Lewis, moved to Washington County, Pa., in about 1785, where I was born Jan. 12, 1818. My father, Jehu Lewis and family, moved to Putnam Co., IL., in 1838, and died there in 1855, aged 76 years. My visitor informed me that our ancestor, Henry Lewis 1st, settled six miles west of the city of Philadelphia on property since known as "The Grange" now one of the most beautiful and splendidly ornamental places in Delaware County, and at one time belonged to Gen, Geo. B. McClellan's grandfather, Mr. Brinton."

PERSONAL ACCOUNT.

Samuel R. Lewis's mother was Rachel Mills, a daughter of Henry Mills, of Washington, Pa. The result of her union with Jehu Lewis was: John, who died when young, Mrs. Chase, Joseph, and Samuel R, who were the only children living when the family came west, two others having died while mere infants. In 1833 Samuel R. was a somewhat ambitious lad aged 15 years, and, being the eldest of the children, rightfully assumed the next in command, under his father, in conducting their moving expedition westward. While he had never read dime novels and knew nothing of the swash-buckler, cow-boy, semi-brigand Indian exterminator, the hero of modern back woods and wild prairie, mountain and canyon romance, and the beau ideal of the half baked latter day youths imagination, yet he was not afraid of Indians or wild animals, and felt himself man enough for any moderate-sized adventure, and probably could have met one with average courage mixed with a due allowance of "skeer." Mr. Jehu Lewis lived not very far from the Monongehela River in those days, and it was not a serious affair for him to pack such of his "traps and calamities," as he needed for his new home, and slight expense to load them, together with his family, upon a steam boat which floated down to the broad Ohio River; thence a larger vessel bore them to the mighty Mississippi, and up to St. Louis. Here they took a smaller packet and in a few days found themselves at Pekin, IL., where they disembarked and remained all summer. During that season Jehu Lewis had pretty thoroughly explored the region along the Illinois River as far as the "Great Bend," above Hennepin, and finally selected a location on which afterwards became famous as "Ox-bow Prairie"- most delightful and prodigiously fertile spot of land, two or three miles wide and about twice as long, surrounded by timber whose edges, bordering upon this peculiar strip of prairie, form the outline of a mammoth Ox-bow. The shape is perfect, though the scale is gigantic. But Mr. Lewis's first farm was near the mouth of Crew Creek, and in order to secure it, he rode on horseback from the sight of his claim in the

edge of the woods to Springfield and “bid it in” at the government land sale in the summer of 1833. His first cabin in the west, on the land thus bought, stood on the edge of Crow Creek timber, not far from the present pretty little village of Washburn. In the neighborhood of his old home in Pennsylvania, and all through the country -the “Quaker State”- there were numerous citizens of this meek and benevolent sect. And while reasonably content with their lot among the hills and valleys, upon the rocky ledges and stony ravines, yet there came to them continually, from others who had gone before, accounts painted in dazzling colors of a country where nature had apparently capped the climax of all her efforts in making a paradise for the laborer; where trees grew not, nor roots wound their sinuous and stubborn courses through the soil; where rugged stumps reared not their hated forms in the meadows; where rocks and stones abide not, nor logs hide in the fields, nor holes nor bogs nor hills abound, but where deep alluvial soil stretches miles away beyond the line of vision, and tall luxuriant grass, nature’s own free meadow, in wave after wave, upon the prairie sea present pictures of luxuriant grandeur unknown to men of the eastern hills and hollows. So, even the meek and humble Quakers, who abominate covetousness and advocate patient industry and believe in laboring and in waiting. So it came to pass that a large came west and had settled on and about Ox-bow prairie.

COLONY OF QUAKERS

Before Mr. Lewis had left the hills of Pennsylvania many of the society of friends had struck across the wilds of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois for Magnolia, and had arrived and built their cabins and were duly acclimated by the mosquitoes and the ague. The settlement of the society of friends went on increasing in numbers and spread of territory, and soon a meeting house of logs was built near Clear Creek, and the fame thereof went afar, and all Quakers who had been seduced from their hard lives among the

rocks and crags, hills and holes of the east by the broad, rich and pleasant prairies and the certainty of wealth and ease in Illinois, (and Quakers after all are but men). Attracted many, so they came to the common center-the "Quaker Settlement" at Magnolia, and there settled and led peaceful, quiet lives, and grew rich, and number among the best of our western people. And they held their quaint form of worship, meeting in the old log house, till after they built a more pretentious edifice, which stands to this day. There they have met Sunday after Sunday for nearly two generations, the women seated on one side of the room and the men on the other. But not, as often reported, often sitting in silence for an hour, they have dispersed without the slightest exercise, because "the spirit failed to move some one to speak," for they usually have excellent congregational singing. Some one reads from the scripture, and comments are often made upon the lessons read. Their lives are peaceful, happy and contented. The old ladies are the most beautiful in the world, for by a lifetime of gentleness-ever governing the tongue and subduing the temper, never fretting or "worrying" – they keep their faces serene and defy the wrinkles of time. In their girlhood they wore no peg heeled shoes, nor did they paint nor enamel their cheeks, nor poison their lips nor eye-lids, nor eat chalk or arsenic. Neither did they wear thin shoes nor expose their persons to cold or damp air because of scanty dress, nor did they keep late hours, nor did they torture their waists to make them small pinch their hands or feet. Their lives have been industrious, quiet, unimpassioned, healthy, sensible; and so in their old days, instead of being repulsive, withered hags, they are sweet, beautiful, angelic, such dear, kind, affectionate, thoughtful old ladies as nowhere else are seen. And the men, too, for the most part, share with their sisters in happy lives and serene and handsome old age. The fame of Mr. Jehu Lewis as a good man and a trustworthy "friend" preceded him to his new home, and hardly had he established himself at Clear Creek before a delegation of leading brothers from the "Quaker

Settlement” came and urged him to remove into that locality. He soon consented, and sold his farm to Esq. Barnes, a well known citizen, since dead, whose son Thomas, a wealthy resident of Lacon, recently cut Hon Samuel R. Lewis a fine hickory cane from his father’s old farm, a present which Mr. Lewis values highly. Mr Jehu Lewis bought a nice piece of land near Magnolia, and soon had it under a state of fair improvement.

HIS FIRST SIGHT OF THE WEST.

About 1824 and ’25 he was associated with Mr. Jonathan Knight, who was appointed by government to locate the “Old National Road” from Wheeling, Va., to St. Louis, or Alton, IL. Jehu was a whole season with Knight’s party as a clerk in the commissary department, and this job gave him his first sight of the wonderful prairies of Illinois; and after that trip he always insisted that as soon as his boys were grown big enough, he would emigrate to the “Sucker State.” The Black Hawk war kept him back a year or so; but as soon as that affair was settled he started for our prairies.

THE GENIUS OF LIBERTY.

It may not be known to many, save the very earliest settlers, that there was published at Lowell, on the Vermilion River, in this county, a half a century ago, the first abolitionist newspaper, not only in this state, but in the United States,-in the world, in fact. It was called the Genius of Universal Emancipation but shortened to the Genius of Liberty. Its founder was Benjamin Lundy, who was a co-laborer and personal friend of Wm. Lloyd Garrison, and with him, and far more severely than he, because he was far more daring, suffered persecution, in stripes, chains, jails, mobblings, and every imaginable personal indignity, from the slaveocracy, not only in Tennessee and Virginia, but even in the northern states. He was followed with the most furious zeal by the

champions of slavery, from town to town and village to village and mobbed and abused everywhere he went. The provocation was his persistent attacks by tongue in public places, and his active and keenly pointed pen on every occasion upon the great crime of slavery. He removed his paper from the city of Philadelphia, because he could not safely publish it there, to the wilds of the Vermilion River, in this country, where his wife and other zealous workers in the cause conducted it, while he traveled in the slave and border free states, denouncing the “gigantic curse.” And having become a martyr by the brutality of his opponents, he drew vast crowds in every town, and rarely left a place without having witnessed a pitched battle of clubs, pistols, guns and knives between his friends and foes. Mrs. Benjamin Lundy was Esther Lewis, a daughter of Henry Lewis 2nd, and therefore a relative of S. R. Lewis of our sketch. Hence, it will be seen that as not only his father and all his relatives, as far back as he can trace them were philanthropists. Quakers and abolitionists, but were emancipationists of the aggressive kind, as witness Mrs. Lundy, who wrote herself and also accepted and published editorials and communications of the most fiery sort, denouncing slavery and its supporters in the superlative of condemnatory terms, sending out her husband’s paper by the thousands to slave owners, slave drivers, slave dealers, and distributing these documents among these already incensed people, at the very time her husband was in their midst, and at the risk of his life hurling his bitterest invectives at their pet, peculiar institution. With such antecedents, born and bred an enemy of oppression, it is no wonder that Mr. Jehu Lewis took his place in the front rank of the little band of “original abolitionists” in this region, nor that his son Samuel R. followed in his footsteps. There was another of his relatives at Magnolia, Mr. Wm. Lewis, a son of Henry Lewis, who became a man of note all over the west as a leader, or “captain” of the “Underground railroad,” a history of which is reserved for a future sketch.

EARLY BOYHOOD.

In Pennsylvania, during the 15 years of his residency there, up to 1833, when he became 15 years old and left for the west, educational facilities were little or none. There was occasionally a log cabin school house, here and there among the mountains, but at such long distances apart, and almost inaccessible to children, especially those under 12 or 15 years old. Hills and even mountains intervened; deep ravines fronted them or cut them off in the rear; brambles, thorn-apples, nettles, mosquitoes, venomous snakes and even bears were often in the way; and the way was often an imaginary line through dense forests and beset with all the above mentioned obstructions. School teachers could not always be had, so the school house in the wilderness was oftener occupied by bats, owls, toads, lizards and snakes than by pedagogue and pupils, especially in summer, for then the larger boys and girls were kept at home by necessity, helping their parents to solve the often difficult problem of “getting a living” – of food and clothing for themselves and the little ones. Samuel R. attended a few of these winter schools-just enough to wet his appetite for learning-for an education which he never could obtain. He bought books expensive, too, they were in those days, and illy adapted to the needs of the beginner, and he studied by the fire side nights and at odd moments. Though he could not thus obtain a liberal education he acquired a habit which we have observed in many other old settlers, and one which is of the greatest to them; they became students at an early age from necessity, and have remained students all their lives from habit; and thus have acquired a far better and more useful and practical general education than their wealthy fellows, who, after graduating at college on a smattering of classical lore, considering themselves finished scholars, have ceased to learn and forgotten the little which they once knew.

After the family came west Samuel had little chances for school, though the Quakers built a school house at an early date near Magnolia, it was too far to it from his father's farm; besides, Samuel being the eldest of the children, very materially assisted on the farm.

HIS MARRIAGE AND NEW HOME.

January 1st, 1842, he was united in marriage with Ann Eliza Harley, whose parents came from Lancaster, Pa., to Putnam County in 1840. The children born to Mr. and Mrs. Lewis were: Wm. R., living near Grand Ridge; E. C., on the Jorl W. Armstrong place in Deer Park; Oliver M., who died when 15 years old; Chas Lundy, a prominent young lawyer and prosecuting attorney of Otter Tail Co. Minn.: two infants, boys who lie in the church yard near by: Anna, their only daughter and pet of the family, whose sad death is mentioned further on; and Morris, the youngest, living on the home place in Fall River, in Ottawa.

In the spring of 1843, young Samuel and his bride of a little over a year came to Ottawa to seek a home for themselves and prospective family. Mrs. Lewis had previously-in 1812 [sic]-with \$200 procured \$800 canal scrip, which had greatly depreciated in value, in fact being good for nothing but to purchase canal land, for, as the Irishman said: "Sure, isn't the whole country full of land, and the balance is water." Mr Lewis had attended the sale at Lockport in 1842, then a larger place than Joliet, than Kulieet, and got Geo. H. Norris to bid off 80 acres of the present Lewis homestead. Mr. Lewis paid for it, all down in this scrip, instead of waiting for 20 years, as he might have done, so he got his deed at once. His land was unbroken prairie, running into the timber, and skirted by hazel brush, crab apples and wild plums. He rented 20 acres of land which had been broken up, and a small cabin from John Palmer, who died years ago: and besides cultivating his rented place managed to do some breaking on his own land. He bought a small frame house in South Ottawa in the fall of 1843, and moved it in wagons and got his family into

it in the commencement of winter. He fenced half of his 80 acres in 1814 [sic], and raised the first crop on his own premises that year. At the next and sale, two or three years after, he bought another 80 acre tract, and also purchased lands elsewhere in the county, 1,000 acres, which he has disposed of so as to give his children each a fair patrimony.

EARLY NEIGHBORS.

Mr. Lewis's first neighbors in Fall River were William Gentleman and Ambrose Trumbo. Across the prairie four miles, at Covell Creek, was Mr. Ebersol. The old Fort family lived at Hickory Point, and afterwards Mr. John Powers moved in between Trumbo's and Ford's. Reeder Galloway lived at the town line of Brookfield; farther along lived Darius Reed. Standing at Mr. Lewis's door, looking in a semi circle from Hickory Point, to the Ebersol Grove, from nearly east to southwest, there stretched a broad expanse of apparently boundless wild prairie. Not a house nor a tree diversified the landscape. In summer a waving sea of tall grass, ornamented with a profusion of flowers, stretching away to beyond the bounds of vision; in winter a dreary interminable expanse of snow, or, in autumn, after a prairie fire, a blackened plain of gloomy desolation. Wolves in packs howled concerts to other wolves, not only in the night, but in the daytime; and the cowardly marauders, made fierce by hunger, not unfrequently visited the cabins and bore off pigs and poultry. Deer in droves gracefully bounded past the house to the prairies, in fall and winter mornings to feed on the second crop of tender grass under the snow about the ponds, returning in the evening to sleep in the shelter of the trees in the ravines. Prairie chickens in countless numbers in many flocks, when the snow covered the ground and the air was sharp and crisp in bright winter mornings, would line the branches of the trees and make the woods coval with their quaint cackling; or, in the spring, the males of the flocks would perform their

curious love dances and utter their solemn notes of courtship. Their droning cries, sounding like “boo-woo-woo,” were ever welcome harbingers of spring.

POLITICAL INCIDENTS.

County organization was adopted in 1850, and Mr. Lewis became one of the first supervisors of Fall River, which he held without interruption for many years, save when in 1855, he was elected county treasurer, which office he held until 1859; and in 1878 he was chosen state senator, which responsible and honorable post he held four years. He was chairman of the board most of his time while one of its members, and usually chairman of the finance committee. In 1857 and prior, county orders had been “going beg-ing” at 50 cents on a dollar, Mr. Lewis and Wells Wait concluded it would do to fund the county debt and thus bring up orders to par. This was accomplished mainly by the persistent efforts of Mr. Lewis. Who never despaired nor lessened his energetic efforts, though at first vigorously opposed, till he succeeded.

THE DRAFT.

During his term as supervisor, in the gloomy period of the Civil War, when drafting became necessary to fill the quota from the towns, to fill up the states’s demand upon each county, Supervisor Lewis was active and efficient in discharging a double duty: that of securing acceptable recruits and at the same time causing the burden of the draft to fall as lightly and as equally as possible upon the citizens of his town. To do this he had to make frequent visits to Joliet, military headquarters for this district. He handled all the funds for his town, both from voluntary sources and from the county treasurer for two terms, with scrupulous and exact fidelity. So, too, while a senator, he was always in his seat, never neglecting the interests of his constituents, but always alert and faithful.

DEATH OF THEIR DARLING.

No one reaches the age of half a century without having experienced some great disappointment, some bitter regret or poignant sorrow. Some pall of gloom is allotted to every one, sooner or later, and that of this excellent family was the death of their only daughter, Anna, the light of their eyes and the idol of their hearts. She had reached the age of nine years, and the sweetness of infancy had begun to merge into the bloom and loveliness of girlhood. The character of her mind was forming, evincing intelligence far beyond her years; and as she had grown in stature, so had she expanded as a rosebud, just bursting out into its perfection of form, coloring and perfume. Her character was trustful and sweet, her disposition gentle and, her heart a fountain of pure affection. She was her father's especial pet and companion, the last to bid him good bye on his departures, the first to greet him on his returnings. He had been among the soldiers away from home, and had been exposed to rain one night coming home. Next morning he had a strange fever, he could eat no food, and in a few days mysterious blotches appeared, but in a week or more the fever left him, the blotches vanished, his appetite returned and he was himself again; but little Annie, who had been his most faithful nurse, grew ill, and very ill, and strange blotches, such as had visited him but far more marked appeared. He went to Ottawa, he described his little one's symptoms to Dr. Hard, and to his agony of terror and apprehension was informed that he had correctly diagnosed a case of small pox! Not a moment was suffered to be lost. The doctor was hurried to the bedside of the little patient and his worst fears confirmed. How she caught the malady was never definitely settled. He may have gotten it in his clothing at the barracks at Joliet, or brushed against some infected person or object. He seemed to have had a light form of veroloid, but that does not necessarily disseminate small-pox. But now no matter. The sweet little sufferer, burning with the fever, had an antidote to her pain, in the love

for her father and mother and her brothers. She complained not, and tried to be cheerful for her heart-broken companions. So they watched her day and night and anticipated as much as they were able every want in their power to relieve. So the weary hours dragged themselves along one by one and the gentle chill grew weaker and her eyes more dim, till the angels came and bore her pure spirit away and left only her cold form, still lovely in death; and they enshrouded it in flowers embalmed with their tears, and they laid it tenderly away in the church-yard as a precious bud, to bloom again in another and a better world.

Mr. and Mrs. Lewis are passing the evening of their lives in their old home, every nook and corner of which is filled with objects, all of happy memories save one, the picture of a beautiful little girl, and that cannot suggest so much sorrow for her death, as of joy for her childish, innocent and pure face is lighted with a heavenly smile, and her sweet image lovingly leads them to “a land that is fairer than this,” where some day they hope to have a permanent reunion of father and mother, sons and daughter in the house that is not built with hands-the house of everlasting happiness.

J. G. ARMSTRONG

Borrowed from The Ottawa Free Trader published June 11, 1877