

PERSONAL SKETCHES

OF SOME OF THE PROMINENT MEN AND PIONEERS OF BUTLER COUNTY.

HON. JOHN WOODS.

Alexander Woods, father of John Woods, was a native of Ireland, born in the county of Tyrone, in 1768. In 1790 he left his native land and came to the United States, and resided for some years in the eastern part of Pennsylvania. He afterwards came to the West, first to Kentucky, and afterwards to Warren County, Ohio; where he purchased a farm a few miles east of the town of Franklin, which he improved, and on which he resided until the time of his decease. He died on the 9th day of January, 1848. He was married, in 1793, in Pennsylvania, to Mary Robinson, who was born in 1762, and who died on the 16th of August, 1828, having become the mother of eight children. John Woods, the oldest son, and the subject of this sketch, was born in Jonestown, Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, on the 18th of October, 1794. When Alexander Woods settled upon his land, in what is now Warren County, in the year 1797, the country was a primitive wilderness, the lofty trees had to be prostrated, and the dense forest cleared by hard labor, before the land could be brought to a fit condition for cultivation. His son John, then in almost infancy, was reared in a log cabin, and as soon as his strength would admit, had to participate in the labors of the farm. He received such an education as the common schools of the country at that time afforded, which, by severe study at nights and such times as he could spare from hard labor on the farm, he improved, much to his advantage in after-life. He served as a soldier in the war of 1812. He was included in the last draft of the Ohio militia, which was made in 1814, and was in the garrison at Fort Meigs when peace with Great Britain was proclaimed. On his return from the army, he opened an English school in the neighborhood of Springborough, which he continued for one or two years. From boyhood Mr. Woods had formed the resolution of acquiring an education and finally becoming a lawyer; and for the purpose of enabling him to carry out his design he contracted, for a certain compensation, to clear a piece of ground adjacent to where his father lived, as a means of support. He built a hut or camp on his clearing, and after chopping and mauling the heavy timber all day, at night he often read and studied law in his rude cabin while others slept. He pursued his course of reading under the direction of Hon. John McLean, who had been a member of Congress and one of the Judges of the Supreme Court of the United States. Mr. Woods prosecuted his studies in this manner for some time, and went regularly once a week to Lebanon, where Judge McLean then resided, to recite to him and receive instructions. He afterwards devoted his time more exclusively to the study of law. Having qualified himself for admission to the bar, and having undergone an examination touching his legal knowledge and abilities, he made application to the Supreme Court of the State, sitting at Dayton, in Montgomery County, at their June term, 1819, and was admitted to practice as an attorney- and counsellor-at-law in the courts of Ohio. Afterwards, in January, 1825, he received a license as attorney- and solicitor-at-law to practice in the courts of the United States. In August, 1819, he established himself in Hamilton, and, opening an office on the 19th of that month, commenced the practice of his profession. The courts of Hamilton were then attended by some of the old and able lawyers from Cincinnati and Lebanon, with whom Mr. Woods had to come in competition. At his first attempts at the bar, Mr. Woods said that he sometimes felt himself in rather an awkward predicament, with a confusion of ideas; but, reflecting that but few of a large audience could immediately perceive what was sound sense or the reverse, that those who were capable of thus discriminating were probably the most generous and indulgent to youthful orators, and that it was necessary, at all events, to succeed in his profession, he made it a positive rule never to sit down or to hesitate or halt, but to talk on and go ahead. And he did go ahead. In 1820 he was appointed Prosecuting Attorney for the County of Butler, in which office he served till 1825, at which time his services as member of Congress commenced, when he resigned. On the 20th of June, 1820, John Woods was married to Miss Sarah Ann Lynch, of Springborough, Warren County. She was a native of South Carolina, born on the 29th of December, 1801. They forthwith commenced house-keeping in Hamilton. At the general election in October, 1824, he was elected a representative in Congress from the Second Congressional District, composed of the Counties of Butler and Warren, over Thomas R. Ross, of Lebanon, who had been the former representative. His term of service commenced on the 4th of March, 1825, but he was not required to take his seat until the first Monday of December following. On the 18th of October, 1824, Mr. Woods formed a partnership with Michael B. Sargent in the practice of the law. Mr. Sargent was a fine classical and literary scholar, as well as a thorough lawyer. His qualifications and strict attention to business in superintending the affairs of the office, while Mr. Woods was absent attending Congress, were of great advan-

tage to Mr. Woods. Mr. Sargent died suddenly on the 19th of May, 1830. When Mr. Woods's first term in Congress expired, he was again elected for a second term, so that he served four years, from the 4th of March, 1825, until the 4th of March, 1829. While there he was distinguished for his industry and attention to business. On the 18th of January, 1828, Mr. Woods, from the Committee on Roads and Canals, made a report accompanied by a bill "to aid the State of Ohio in extending the Miami Canal from Dayton to Lake Erie." The bill was twice read and committed and finally passed, and became a law on the 4th of May following. By this law there was granted to the State of Ohio a quantity of land equal to the one-half of five sections in width, on each side of said canal between Dayton and the Maumee River, at the mouth of the Auglaize. The same law also granted to the State of Ohio the further quantity of five hundred thousand acres of land for the purpose of aiding the State in the payment of the debts which had been or might thereafter be contracted in the construction of her canals. Mr. Woods was a warm friend of internal improvements, and while in Congress advocated that measure with all his energy. At the session just referred to, the subjects of the tariff, internal improvement, Indian appropriations, and Indian affairs were largely debated, in all of which he took a prominent part. He was decided and ardent in politics as he was in everything else. He warmly opposed the election of General Jackson to the Presidency. This threw him in the minority in Butler County, which was then about three-fourths in favor of Jackson. The consequence was that, at the end of his second term, he was defeated by the election of James Shields. After Mr. Woods retired from Congress he became the proprietor, publisher, and editor of the Hamilton *Intelligencer*, which he conducted with great ability for three years, a portion of the latter part of the time in connection with Lewis D. Campbell, who assumed the business management of the concern. Although Mr. Woods was engaged in editing a newspaper and attending to various other kinds of business, he did not relinquish the practice of his profession as a lawyer, but prosecuted it vigorously until the year 1845. On the 30th day of January, 1845, the Legislature of the State of Ohio elected him Auditor of the State for the term of three years from the 15th of March ensuing, at which time he went to Columbus and entered on the duties of his office. At that time the State of Ohio had been running in debt from year to year, borrowing money to pay the interest on the State debt, and thus compounding it, until the public obligations loomed up in fearful magnitude. John Brough, the former Auditor, had vainly endeavored to accomplish a reform in taxation; fear brooded over the members of the Legislature, none dared to touch the dreaded subject. It was necessary that something should be done. Mr. Woods represented the condition of affairs to the Legislature, and strongly urged upon them to take measures to remedy the evil; and it was mainly through his instrumentality, and by his courage, industry, and perseverance that the State was saved from repudiation, bankruptcy, and ruin. By virtue of his office, Mr. Woods was one of the Board of Fund Commissioners, who contracted the loans on behalf of the State, and had the control of the public debt. When he went into office there was not found in any of the offices at Columbus a book in which was entered an account by which the condition of the State debt could be clearly seen. Mr. Woods procured a set of books, and from the loose papers found in the office of the Fund Commissioners and in the Auditor's office, he had a set of accounts opened, showing the amount of each description of public debt and the balance remaining standing. He also introduced important reforms in the mode of keeping some of the accounts in the office, by which they were simplified and rendered more intelligible. As Auditor he left indelible marks on the policy and history of the State. He had determined to relinquish his office at the expiration of his first term of three years, but through the persuasion of a number of his influential friends throughout the State, he was induced to serve for another term, and accordingly was re-elected, and remained until March, 1851, when he returned to Hamilton.

His habits of industry and restless energy would not, however, permit him to remain idle. He became President of the Eaton and Hamilton Railroad Company, and brought his strong powers to bear on the prosecution and completion of that work. Previous to the second election, after Mr. Woods became President, a proposition was agitated and advocated by many for the construction of a branch road from Eaton to Piqua by the Eaton and Hamilton Company. This Mr. Woods strongly opposed, and in consequence was defeated at the second election. Subsequent events have proved the correctness of his judgment on this subject. With some difficulty and trouble the Eaton and Hamilton Railroad Company have since been released from their obligation to construct that branch of road. Immediately after retiring from the Eaton and Hamilton Road, Mr. Woods was appointed and accepted the office of President of the Junction Railroad, leading from Hamilton to Oxford, Conn-

ville, and thence to Indianapolis; to the prosecution of which work he brought his energy to bear, and faithfully attended to the business of the office, with honor to himself and to the advantage of the company.

Until the time of his death Mr. Woods was indefatigable and persevering in everything he undertook. His energy was untiring, and his firmness indomitable. His early course of life had rendered his constitution hardy and capable of great endurance. At the bar, his conduct was a model for imitation, despising all low and illiberal practice. To the junior members of the bar he was ever prompt to extend his friendship and patronage; and as an adviser to young men beginning life he won many friends among rising men by his generous treatment and sympathy. To the judges of the court he was polite and respectful; and to witnesses he was considerate and candid, never attempting to puzzle or embarrass them, except when there were strong signs of falsehood or corruption. None, it is believed, ever discharged their trusts as a lawyer with more scrupulous fidelity and spotless integrity. The strong mind and energy of Mr. Woods have left their impression on almost every public improvement in and about Hamilton. He was a liberal contributor to everything which had for its object the promotion of the happiness of man. Many years ago he took a leading part in founding and establishing the Hamilton and Rossville Female Academy. He was active in the construction of the Cincinnati and Hamilton Turnpike Road, of which he was a director. He was President of the Darrrtown and Fairhaven Pike. He was one of the leading spirits in projecting and constructing the Hamilton and Rossville Hydraulic Works. He spent considerable time in procuring subscriptions for the Cincinnati, Hamilton and Dayton Railroad, in which he was largely interested, and of which he was a director during his life. Indeed, far more of the energy displayed in carrying forward that great work came from Mr. Woods than from any other man. In his temperament he was decidedly amiable, and of a most kind and forgiving disposition. His walk through life was without any deviation from the paths of honor and rectitude. In his dealings and business relations he was prompt, honorable, and expert, and a patron of integrity. Law and order had in him an undeviating advocate. He was always found on the moral side of every public question. He was a regular attendant at the house of worship of the Associate Reformed Church, of which he was a consistent member. The purity of his private morals has never been questioned. In the early part of the month of July, 1855, Mr. Woods was attacked with inflammation of the lungs, so severe as to cause strong apprehensions of its fatal termination. However, he became better, and hopes were entertained that his system would rally, but the disease finally terminated in typhoid fever with ulceration of the bowels, which ended his existence on Monday, the thirtieth day of the month, in the sixty-first year of his age. His funeral took place at five o'clock, p.m., on Tuesday the 31st. The services on the occasion were by the Rev. William Davidson, of the Associate Reformed Church, of which Mr. Woods was a member; after which the corpse was conveyed to Greenwood Cemetery, followed by one of the largest concourses of citizens ever assembled in Hamilton on a similar occasion. His remains were consigned to the tomb amid the regrets of numerous friends, and with the respect due to a life of integrity and useful public services. A fine engraving of Mr. Woods is found in this Atlas.

HON. JOHN W. SOHN,

whose portrait, as well as view of residence, is found in this Atlas, is perhaps one of the best known citizens of Hamilton, Butler County, Ohio. He was born in Wintshelm, Kingdom of Bavaria, Germany. His parents, although not very wealthy, commanded sufficient means to give their children—of which they had eleven—a thorough education and practical training. The city of Wintshelm had been a free town till Napoleon changed the map of Europe, when it fell to the Crown of Bavaria. It has about six thousand inhabitants, and is built on the defensive plan, with winding streets and a strong stone wall: with a gallery which has been, in time of peace, a beautiful promenade for the inhabitants. It forms yet a beautiful lookout on the surroundings. Prominent among the surroundings is a romantic elevation, with a watch-tower, which is known there as a wine hill. It was the property of Ludwig Sohn, the father of the subject of this sketch. Here young Sohn had to pass many hours in digging, plowing, planting, and such work as belongs to the toilsome duty of a farmer and wine-grower; and when the little bell of the school-house reminded the young that the time for study had arrived, young Sohn was not one of the last who assembled around in the halls of learning. The time of his attendance at the Latin school of his birthplace was a remarkable time,—remarkable because a feeling of dissatisfaction with the then political institution made itself known. A spirit of independence, the love for liberty planted by the Creator in every human breast, filled the thoughts of all who suffered from a degrading monarchy.