

GEORGE SMITH, M. D.

BY CHARLES HENRY HART, Historiographer.

Read May 4th, 1882.

Dr. George Smith, well known as the author of the History of Delaware County, Pennsylvania, died at his residence in Upper Darby, Delaware County, Pa., March 10th, 1882, in his seventy ninth year. He was born February 12th, 1804, in Haverford Township, Delaware County, Pa., and was the youngest child and only son of Benjamin Hayes Smith, and Margaret Dunn, his wife. His father was fourth in descent, maternally, from Richard Hayes, a Friend, who emigrated from Ilmiston, Pembrokeshire, Wales, in 1687, and settled on the tract of land in Haverford Township, yet owned by his descendants, the family of the late Dr. Smith. Richard Hayes died in 1697, and his grand-daughter Elizabeth married George Smith, son of Thomas Smith, who emigrated to Pennsylvania, from Ilkley, England; and they were the grandparents of the subject of this notice. Dr. Smith's father, represented Delaware County in the Legislature of Pennsylvania, from 1801 to 1804. He was appointed a Justice of the Peace by Governor McKean, although politically opposed to him, and continued until his death, in 1806, to hold that as well as other positions of honor and trust.

Dr. Smith was brought up in Haverford and Radnor. He received his early education in the day schools of the neighborhood, and subsequently passed some time at the boarding school of Jonathan Gause, in Chester County. He then entered the Medical Department of the University of Pennsylvania, and received his degree as Doctor of Medicine April 7th, 1826. His active connection with the profession was, however, of short duration. He retired in about five years, and devoted his time to farming and attending to the numerous public and private trusts that were forced upon him. From 1832 to 1836, he represented the district, composed of Chester and Delaware Counties, in the State Senate, retiring December

8, 1836, to accept the appointment tendered to him by Governor Joseph Ritner, of Associate Judge of the Court of Common Pleas of his native county, an office he was chosen to fill again for five years from the first Monday in December, 1861, by the suffrages of his fellow men. He not being bred to the law, his position was that of lay-judge. In June, 1854, he was made Superintendent of Common Schools for Delaware County—the first person to hold the office—and for twenty-five years held the position of President of the School Board of Upper Darby School District. "His connection," says his son, A. Lewis Smith, to whom I am indebted for the material for this sketch, "with the organization of the common school system of Pennsylvania, was one of the earliest and perhaps the most noteworthy incident of his mature years. At the time he was elected a member of the State Senate, the effort to introduce this system received but half-hearted support from its professed friends, and encountered most violent opposition in every part of the State. Previous efforts had failed to secure the enactments of a permanent law of the necessary scope to provide for the free education of the people, and as he was an earnest advocate of the measure, he at once united with those of similar views in endeavoring to secure the passage of a proper bill for the purpose. As Chairman of the Senate Committee on Education, he was called upon to draw up a bill embracing the entire subject. Supported by the powerful advocacy of Thaddeus Stevens, and the wide influence of Governor Wolf, this bill was passed substantially as reported, and proved to be the first practical and efficient measure on the subject of general education in the State of Pennsylvania."

In addition to these matters of public importance, Dr. Smith was devoted to scientific pursuits, giving considerable attention to botany and geology, especially the former; a taste generated, no doubt, by his medical studies. This brought him into intimate relations with prominent scientists, such as John Cassin, the ornithologist; Dr. William Darlington, the botanist; Professor Joseph Liedy, the paleontologist, and many others of similar pursuits. To foster these tastes and promote the study and diffusion of general knowledge and the establishment of a museum, he, with John Cassin, George Miller, Minshall Painter and John Miller, founded, in September, 1833, "The Delaware County Institute of Science." The membership gradually increased, and the Institute was in-

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corporated February 8, 1836. The following year a hall was built in Upper Providence, where the meetings of the Institute have since been held and its Museum located. The latter embraces an important collection of specimens in every department of the Natural Sciences, particularly such as are calculated to illustrate the natural history of the county. To perfect this collection, Dr. Smith, a few years since, presented to the Museum his valuable herbarium.

It was in connection with this body, of which Dr. Smith was President from its foundation until his death, and under its auspices, that he prepared and published the *History of Delaware County, Pennsylvania, from the Discovery of the Territory included within its limits to the present time. With a notice of the Geology of the County and Catalogues of its minerals, plants, quadrupeds and birds.* This work is an octavo volume of nearly six hundred pages, with several maps and illustrations, and was issued in the year 1862. It is a model county history, and one of the best local histories yet produced in this country. It is minute and thorough, yet not dry and tiresome. It is not only well written, but it is exceedingly interesting, made so by the mode in which the subject is presented to the reader. In addition to the contents as set forth in the title, the volume contains seventy-six pages of biographical notices of persons identified with the county. A vast deal of information is thus preserved which can not be found elsewhere, and the admirable method of placing them by themselves in dictionary form, instead of distributing them through the body of the work, makes them readily accessible and does not interrupt the narrative of the text. Dr. Smith held the pen of a ready writer and contributed numerous controversial articles to the local press on the removal of the seat of Justice from Chester to Media, and upon other subjects. He also published *An Account of the great Rainstorm and Flood of 1843*, and *An Essay demonstrating the fitness of the stone quarried at Leiper's Quarry, in Delaware County, for use in erecting the Delaware Breakwater.*

Dr. Smith was a consistent member of the Society of Friends, and his handsome presence and genial manners will be missed alike by his acquaintances and friends. He was married February 26th, 1829, in the presence of the Hon. George M. Dallas, Mayor of Philadelphia, to Mary Lewis, only child of Abraham and Rebecca (Lawrence) Lewis. Of this marriage eight children were born, five of whom survive the father.

The eldest, Abraham Lewis Smith, a much respected member of the Philadelphia bar, and the youngest, Clement Lawrence Smith, a Professor in Harvard College, who has just recently been chosen Dean of the faculty.

Dr. George Smith was elected an Honorary member of this Society, April 2d, 1868, upon the nomination of his old friend, our much respected President Mr. Price. I regret that my opportunities do not afford me the facilities for presenting a more extended sketch of his life and character.