



HARRY E. BONSTALL.

Harry Ellsworth Bonsall.— A coming young man in Juniata County is **Harry E. Bonsall**, editor and proprietor of the Juniata Tribune, and postmaster of the town of Mifflin. High in the counsels and confidence of the leaders of the State Democracy, active and prominent in local politics, foremost in blazing the way for every great home improvement beneficial to his large constituency of newspaper patrons, and phenomenally lavish in the use of his columns for the advancement of meritorious men and measures, and in familiarizing his readers with the same by means of printed portraits and pictures, he is at the age of thirty-five years, a man of established high character and standing, of weight and influence in the community in which he was born, and of prospective power and wealth before he has rounded out his busy and eventful career.

Mr. Bonsall was born in Mifflintown, August 19, 1862. His father was **Amos G.**

Bonsall, one of the best known editors in the Juniata Valley, who for thirty-seven years (with a single break of one year) occupied the editorial chair in Mifflintown. His grandfather, **Benjamin Bonsall**, was for years a merchant of the most enviable repute in Juniata County, and served the people thereof for one term as treasurer and one term as register and recorder, defeating so popular a man as Joseph M. Belford for the latter place.

Benjamin Bonsall came to Juniata County many years ago from Greenwood Township, Wildcat Valley, Perry County, where he had married **Miss Sarah Bender**, a sister of **Jacob Bender** who died in Newport, Perry County, in 1896, at an advanced age. As early as 1836 **Benjamin Bonsall** opened a grocery store on the bank of the canal in the town of Mifflin, a short distance below the present site of the bridge which connects the boroughs of Mifflin and Patterson. Here he sold to the citizens and passing boatmen groceries, liquors (for they went with the business in those days), hay, feed, plaster, fish and other stores, thereby accumulating a modest fortune. He became the owner of considerable property, on both sides of the river, and at his death was survived by four children: **Amos G.**; **John C.**; **Samuel**; and **Sadie**, all of whom are now deceased except the daughter, who is the widow of **Dr. H. Clarence Derr** (a brother of the late Dr. **George L. Derr**, of Mifflintown), a dentist, and now residing in Milton, Northumberland County.

Amos Gustine Bonsall, father of **H. E. Bonsall**, was born May 5, 1833, and died April 24, 1888. For nearly twenty years he was a sufferer from asthma and pulmonary troubles, and for the last two years of his life was almost constantly confined to his house, and during most of that period to his bed. **Amos Bonsall** was twice married, his first wife having been **Miss Caroline Frankhouser**, daughter of **Jacob Frankhouser**, and sister of the late **Jerry Frankhouser** and **Mrs. Benjamin Kepner**, the latter of whom still lives near Hawns Mill, a short distance southeast of the town of Patterson. **Mrs. Bonsall** died a number of years ago of consumption. They had four children, of whom only one is now living, **Orlando**, an employee of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company at their roundhouse in Harrisburg. **Mr. Bonsall's** second wife was **Miss Rebecca Pannebaker Kepner**, eldest daughter of **Benjamin F. Kepner** (a distant relative of the Kepner's first mentioned), for many years the principal druggist in Mifflintown. The second **Mrs. Bonsall** died in 1885. Four of their children still live: **Harry Ellsworth**; **Gertrude May**; **Minnie Laura**; and **Bessie Isabel (Mrs. Milton Larkin)**, of Beverly, N. J. In 1885 **Harry E. Bonsall** was married to **Miss Laura Alice Watts**, the only daughter of **David Watts**, of Mifflintown. They have four children: **Edith Elizabeth**; **Anna Margaret**; **Charles David**; and **Herman Ellsworth**.

Amos G. Bonsall, the eldest son of **Benjamin Bonsall**, first appeared prominently on the scenes in 1851, when his father bought for him an interest in the Juniata Register, and established him as one of the editors thereof. The paper was purchased from Maj. William Cooper, Mr. Bonsall's partner being Samuel E. Hench, a well known and successful lawyer. **Amos Bonsall** never served a regular apprenticeship to the printing trade, though he became a good compositor. He "just picked it up between times," as some of the most famous editors in the land have done. Lawyer Hench retired from his editorial labors in a few years, leaving the paper in full control of Mr. Bonsall. On January 1, 1858, the direction of the Register was assumed by Adam J. Greer and Andrew G. Allison. They ran it for one year only, however, when Mr. Bonsall bought back the property, and continued to direct its fortunes until it was merged with the True Democrat, then owned by William J. Jackman, under the name of the Democrat and Register, in 1867. The harmonious partnership of Bonsall & Jackman existed for twenty-one years, and, since the death of **Mr. Bonsall**, Mr. Jackman has continued as editor and proprietor of the Democrat and Register. This newspaper partnership was brought about in a rather peculiar way. Samuel P. Loudon and William J. Jackman were conducting a clothing and furnishing store under the firm name of Loudon & Jackman, in a room in the old William W. Wilson mansion, on Bridge street next to the canal bridge, now occupied by Mr. Wilson's son-in-law, Charles W. Mayer. **Mr. Bonsall** bought ex-Sheriff Loudon's interest therein, and the firm became known as Jackman & Bonsall. The two partners found their interests and tastes suited to one another so well that they afterward consolidated their two newspapers, and, that neither should be given under prominence over the other, the order of precedence in the name of the new firm was changed, and thus originated the well known newspaper and printing house of Bonsall & Jackman.

During the war of the Rebellion **Mr. Bonsall** was a unique figure in Pennsylvania journalism. He made many bitter enemies during those troublous times, and his discussions with Rev. A. L. Guss (then editor of the Juniata Sentinel, a contemporary Republican paper) were marked with so much rancor and so many offensive personalities that bloodletting by the two men was regarded as being constantly impending. So hateful did the utterances of the Register become to

some of the more pronounced Abolitionists, that there was on more than one occasion talk of mobbing Editor Bonsall. But he stuck fearlessly to his plan of attack, and his personal popularity and that of his newspaper were attested by the frequent "Letters from the Front," which appeared in the Register from Juniata soldiers who were fighting in the Union army. Between these absent citizens and their families and friends it was the favorite and almost only means of communication, and no more interesting reading to a Juniata man can anywhere be found than that contained in the files of the Register from 1861 to 1865. After the war had ceased, the people of Juniata county, as a whole, took **Amos Bonsall**, always a fun-loving and popular fellow, back into their confidence and affection, though a few of the more radical Republicans hated him until the day of his death, and even pursued his character beyond that sacred barrier. In such circumstances, it is not at all remarkable that he never held an elective office, although he served for a time as a State bank examiner, and during the campaign of 1876 as a clerk in the headquarters of the Democratic State Central Committee at Harrisburg. Beloved by his friends, but cordially hated by his enemies, he was on two or three occasions nominated as the Democratic candidate for Assembly, only to be defeated, his district—then composed of Juniata, Snyder and Union counties—being overwhelmingly Republican in sentiment.

In appearance **Amos G. Bonsall** was a typical dandy of his time. He always looked as though he had just stepped out of a bandbox. He was a man of rather less than medium height, of delicate build, with a broad, high forehead, and a rather long, flowing full beard. In his palmy days Mr. Bonsall's clothing was always of the finest texture, the latest style and the most faultless fit, while his linen was perpetually immaculate, and his hats and footwear were marvels of fresh glossiness. Although his walk bore somewhat of a resemblance to a strut, it was the only gait he knew. In a word, he was a natural, not an artificial, dandy. In his later years, this harmless foppishness almost entirely disappeared, and ill-health and misfortunes saddened and shortened what had promised to be a long and a merry life. He lost a considerable portion of the property accumulated in the coal, clothing and newspaper business, mainly by endorsing paper for friends, and to-day his once brilliant career is but little more than a memory with such of his aforesaid friends and enemies as are still living.

From such stock and in such environment did **Harry Ellsworth Bonsall** figuratively "step into his father's shoes" as the leading Democratic editor in Juniata County. His educational advantages were almost identically the same as those of his father, namely: attendance at the public schools of Mifflintown, and an academic course under that celebrated educator, Prof. David Wilson, the father having studied with him at Tuscarora Academy, and the son at Airy View Academy. At the age of thirteen years **Harry Bonsall** entered the Democrat and Register office as an apprentice to the printing trade, serving the full term of four years. For three years he worked as a compositor in Huntingdon and Harrisburg, and over in New York State, and then returned, on special invitation from Messrs. Bonsall & Jackman, to assume the foremanship of the Democrat and Register office, which post he filled for four years. In 1886 he bought the Times, in Tyrone, Blair County, and continued as editor thereof until 1888, when he sold out to J. C. Nissley. After his father's death, a longing to return to the scenes of his childhood and identify himself permanently with the community which had treated his grandfather, his father and finally himself so generously and kindly, induced him to come back to Mifflintown in the same year and purchase the Juniata Tribune from Theorus D. Garman, now a prosperous lawyer of Nanticoke, Luzerne County, and a brother of John M. Garman, present chairman of the

Democratic State Central Committee. His success, from a financial point of view, may be measured by the fact that he now possesses one of the largest, most complete and most costly newspaper and job printing establishment in central Pennsylvania, and owns the fine large two-story brick building on Bridge street, of which he is the sole occupant, while his dwelling house, at the corner of Fifth and Cherry streets, East Point, is one of the handsomest and most commodious residences in that desirable section of the town, the lot on which it stands having a frontage of 40 feet and a depth of 170 feet.

As stated above, his paper is the largest, most readable and best patronized journal in Juniata County. It is aggressively Democratic in politics, and did splendid service in support of William J. Bryan, in 1896. Like his father, Mr. Bonsall has not been a seeker after public office, his present position of postmaster of Mifflintown being the first and only public place that he has ever sought or filled. But he is a born politician, and his bent in that direction is likely to prove valuable to himself, and of benefit to his fellow-citizens in the near future. The fame of his enterprise as a journalist has spread throughout and far beyond the Juniata Valley. He has been known to devote in a single issue, thirteen and one-half columns of space (brevier and nonpareil partly solid), including pictures of fourteen men, to a history and description in a neighboring town—the Delaware Literary Society, of Thompsettown. On another occasion, in May, 1891, he issued his celebrated "boom" edition, containing eight pages of facts relative to the industries of Juniata County, with pictures of many public and private buildings and likenesses of prominent citizens. Of course, these many ventures did not "pay" directly, or immediately, but they all tended to push The Tribune to the forefront, where it seems now to be permanently established. Editor Bonsall "keeps eternally at it," however, and The Tribune is recognized as the only paper in Mifflintown that can be relied upon for a full and accurate account of every great event, copiously illustrated, as were the reports of the Carpenter murder in Port Royal and the Ramsey murder in East Waterford, whenever the facts and public interest will warrant such additional labor and expense. In this way Mr. Bonsall has come to be looked upon as a pioneer in every great Juniata County enterprise. It was his agitation in the columns of The Tribune that led to the introduction of the water works and the electric light plant, the free bridge across the Juniata River connecting Mifflintown and Patterson, and the complete equipment of the fire departments of the two towns. He is a pronounced, progressive friend of the cause of education, and in 1897 devoted many columns of The Tribune to descriptions of the graduating exercises of the Patterson and the Mifflin high schools, with pictures of the graduates. Editorially, his paper ranks very high, and, living in an agricultural community, Mr. Bonsall has wisely and conscientiously ranged himself on the side of the farmer and the workingman, and does not devote the bulk of his space to borough news to the exclusion of rural topics; in fact, he is inclined to give more to a meeting of grangers than to a session of the town council. Although all his folks were Lutherans, **Mr. Bonsall** is a member of the Westminster Presbyterian Church of Mifflintown, of which the Rev. Alfred N. Raven is pastor. He belongs to but one secret society—the Odd Fellows.

He early imbibed from his father a liking for politics, and at the age of seventeen, in the campaign of 1879, he published a semiweekly four-page political journal called The Mirror, which was credited with having done great service for the Democratic ticket. While publishing the Tyrone Times, in 1887, he was elected a delegate to the Democratic State Convention at Allentown. In that year the great fight was on between Samuel J. Randall and William L. Scott. **Mr. Bonsall's** delegation was uninstructed, but he was the only pronounced Randall man in it.

On being approached by Mr. Randall and asked if he could not influence some of the members of the delegation, young **Bonsall** answered simply: "I'll try!" and went to work. As a result of his labors the entire Blair County delegation to the convention was "swung" for Randall. In many other ways he obliged and made sacrifices for the State leaders until he won the warm regard, confidence and good offices of such powerful men as William F. Harity, William U. Hensel, Robert E. Pattison and Chauncey F. Black. His opportunity for reward came in 1894, when there was a mad scramble by eight Democrats for the postmastership of Mifflintown. The local organization was hopelessly rent asunder, and **Mr. Bonsall** quietly stepped into the position through personal endorsements by recognized State leaders. His administration of the affairs of the office has been such as to give complete satisfaction to all of its patrons, and has tended to greatly enhance his reputation as a capable, careful, conscientious and successful business man.

There have been some strange coincidences in the lives of the three **Bonsalls**—grandfather, father and son—of which the following are interesting specimens: **Jacob Bender**, a brother-in-law of the grandfather, was for many years in charge of the rope ferry for canal boats across the Juniata River below Millerstown. When **Benjamin Bonsall** first came to Juniata County he was appointed lock-tender at the "first lock" above Mifflintown. Subsequently he established a store and warehouse on the canal bank within the borough limits, and, through trafficking with boatmen, laid the foundation of his fortune.

Amos G. Bonsall's first wife's sister married a **Benjamin Kepner**, and his second wife was a daughter of **Benjamin Kepner**.

The **Benjamin F. Kepner** last named was for many years postmaster of Mifflintown. **David Watts**, the father of **Harry E. Bonsall's** wife, also served one term as postmaster of Mifflintown. If this "sequence" of fathers in-law continues, it is not improbable that the future husband of one of **Harry E. Bonsall's** lovely young daughters may yet be postmaster of Mifflintown. As a sort of forerunner of his coming greatness in the postal service, it ought to be mentioned that **Mr. Bonsall** was for several months employed as a Government route agent between New York and Pittsburg, his "run" being over the Pennsylvania Railroad.

It is an interesting historical fact that the first thing **Benjamin Bonsall** did when he opened his grocery store was to "advertise in his home paper"—the Mifflintown Free Press. His son, **Amos Bonsall**, was an editor at the age of nineteen years, and his grandson, **Harry Bonsall**, was inducted into the editorial chair at a very tender age. In 1877, when only fifteen years old, and while yet an apprentice in the office of the Democrat and Register, he began the publication of a monthly called *The New Enterprise*, which had a successful career of eighteen months' duration. This was an amateur "sporting journal," devoted to baseball, croquet, and other boyish games and gossip; but its field of usefulness was soon extended to embrace the news of and doings in the public schools, in which work its influence was distinctively for good. *The New Enterprise* was set in nonpareil type, and contained either four or six pages, according to "stress of matter" and the "other engagements" of its young editor. After his able conduct of *The Mirror* during the campaign of 1879, it became evident that "**Harry Bonsall** was 'cut out' for a political editor," and the people of Juniata County are to be congratulated on the fact that his personal likings and devotion to his old home induced **Mr. Bonsall** to permanently "cast his lot" with them.

Amos Bonsall was a jolly fellow, fond of sport, especially fishing, and nothing delighted him more than to collect a crowd of good fellows and "go up to Cuba Mill to clean out the race," or "up the canal a seining." **Harry Bonsall** is built pretty much on the same lines. He can hardly wait until "bass are ripe" on Decoration Day, when he marshals his forces and goes off to some remote and isolated spot where there is nobody to count the number of fish they didn't catch. He is an enthusiastic angler, and under the caption "Ike's Fishy Chat," he adds a most enjoyable department to The Tribune every spring, the product of his own brain.

All of which serves to confirm the truth of two ancient maxims—"Like father, like son," and "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy."

www.theperryhistorians.org