

Commemorative Biographical Encyclopedia of the Juniata Valley, Comprising the Counties of Huntingdon, Mifflin, Juniata, and Perry, Pennsylvania, Volume 1, J. M. Runk and Company, Publishers 1897

**Capt. William H. Ewing**, grain, coal and lumber dealer, Newton Hamilton, Mifflin County, Pa., was born January 28, 1827, in the beautiful County Tyrone, in the north of Ireland. He is a son of **William** and **Margery (Hopper) Ewing**. **Captain Ewing** comes of the hardy, liberty-loving and industrious Scotch-Irish race. His father, who was a farmer and weaver, was born in the same county. The father owned and operated a mill of his own, making Irish linen and other similar fabrics of rare workmanship. By his marriage to **Margery**, daughter of **Dennis Hopper**, a farmer of the same county, he had eight children, of whom four now survive, as follows: **Capt. William H.**; **Samuel**, of Newton Hamilton; **Margaret (Mrs. Patrick M. Gilchrist)**, of Bloomington, Ill.; and **Sarah J. (Mrs. L. H. Miller)**, of Kankakee, Ill. The four who died are: **James**, a brave soldier for the Union, during the Civil war, and lost an arm in the service of his country; **Joseph**, also a brave Union soldier, a member of the illustrious Forty-ninth Pennsylvania Volunteers; **John**, who was drowned in the canal near Huntingdon; and **one** who died in infancy.

**William Ewing**, the father, came to America in 1836, accompanied by his family. Their industrious habits, hardy determination, and thrift insured their success in the land of their adoption. The family came over in the sailing vessel "Pacific," embarking from Liverpool, and making the voyage to New York in thirty one days. From this point they came to Philadelphia by steam cars and steamboat. From Philadelphia to Millerstown, Pa., the trip was made by a canal boat. At the latter point, the boat was frozen up, and it was necessary to hitch the canal horses to a team in order to reach Newton Hamilton. **Mr. Ewing** rented a farm in Wayne Township, and cultivated it until 1844, when he bought two boats on the Union Canal, for the transportation of freight between Philadelphia and Hollidaysburg, Blair County, Pa. The boats were managed by the father, assisted by his five sons. One of the principal features of their business was dealing in coal. **Mr. Ewing** continued the freight business for three years, after which he retired from boating, and was known afterward as a "buckwheat lawyer." He lost his wife by death in 1838. He was married again in 1840, to **Mary A. Wallace**, of Concord, and has two children: **Hugh**; and **John**, both of whom are farmers in Fulton County. **William Ewing** was a man of strongly marked and original character, and of great independence of thought and action. He was an old line Whig, and was one of the first Abolitionists in Mifflin County. He was a strict Presbyterian. In County Tyrone, Ireland, he had become a member of the Grand Lodge of Orangemen, as had been his father before him.

**Capt. William H. Ewing** received his education in Ireland, in subscription school, kept in an upper room of his father's house. Coming to this country with his parents, he settled with them in Wayne Township, Mifflin County, Pa. The story of the early life and struggles of **Captain Ewing** read almost like a romance, and is fascinating in its details, as it recalls a bygone period. His first employment was in 1837, when he worked three months for **Samuel Mursin**, of Wayne Township, receiving a compensation of two dollars a month. But these were the palmy days of the canal, when it was the great artery of travel and commerce between the seaboard cities and inland points. Where was the boy of those days, who was near the tow-path, that did not feel its fascinating influence? It need not be a matter of surprise that young **Ewing** fell under the spell.

Besides he thought it opened the way to better compensation. He obtained a position as team driver on the canal, between Hollidaysburg and Philadelphia, at four dollars per month. After four months, he was engaged to drive two horses, for which he received double his former pay. Thus the summers of 1838, '39, and '40 were spent, his pay during the last year being ten dollars per month. In 1841, he was for eight months a towman on the boats "Enterprise" and "Champion," at twelve dollar per month. The season of 1842 he passed as steersman on the boat "Cincinnati," plying between Hollidaysburg and Columbia, Pa. During the season of 1843 he steered on the boat "Experiment," of Newton Hamilton. During 1844 and 1845, he commanded the "Here I Am," for his father, making trips between Hollidaysburg and Philadelphia. For the season of 1846 and 1847, he commanded the boat "Yankee," between Hollidaysburg and Columbia, Pa. In 1848, becoming of age he cast his first vote for Gen. Zachary Taylor for the presidency. During this season and the next, he commanded the boat "Indian." In 1850, he ran the section boat "Young Indian," for which service he received \$135.00 per month. The "Young Indian" had first been named the "Son of Temperance," but fighting whiskey on the deck did not show much consistency with the title, which caused **Captain Ewing** to change the name. By this time, he was one of the best known and most expert men on the canal. In the fall of 1851, he bought a boat of his own and four mules. He named the boat the "Wild Indian," which gave origin to his own subsequent appellation of "Indian Bill." The **Captain** plied this boat for three years between Hollidaysburg and Philadelphia. In 1852, he purchased a second boat which he renamed the "John A. Lemon," in honor of Senator Lemon. This boat he ran for four years, after which he bought a new boat, built in Hollidaysburg, which he operated for seven years. In 1862, the **Captain** had a magnificent boat built, under his own personal supervision, which he named "Edward B. Purcell," in honor of a prominent merchant of Newton Hamilton. **Mr. Purcell** was, at that time, substantially, the banker of that section. Money had become so scarce that the only way to secure a circulating medium was by the issue of fractional currency shinplasters, redeemable in amounts of five dollars at **Mr. Purcell's** store. **Captain Ewing** ran this new boat for eight years, being at the same time in the grain business at Newton Hamilton. Soon after this he had a new boat built at Newport, Perry County, which he named the "Harry," in honor of his son. This boat also he ran for eight years. Another boat, built for him at Beech Haven, Pa., by **Daniel Brader**, was named the "Susie," in honor of his wife. This boat he continued to use until it was bought by the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, at a valuation of \$3,000, which ended his career in connection with the canal. **Captain Ewing** brought the first ton of coal that was burned in the town of Newton Hamilton, where he now sells upwards of two thousand tons yearly. He has been in the coal, grain and lumber business for more than thirty years. The career of the **Captain** strikingly illustrates what industry, thrift business tact and just dealing can accomplish. From a poor boy, he has become an affluent merchant, drawing his stores of grain from the whole surrounding country, owning nine houses in Newton Hamilton, besides an interest in two others, while his mercantile operations extend through the whole surrounding section of the State. The **Captain** is not only wealthy, but still better, is respected and esteemed for his many superior qualities and his rugged, innate honor.

**Captain Ewing** was married in 1852, in New Bloomfield, Perry County, Pa., to **Miss Susan Hayes**, daughter of **Capt. Christian Hayes**, an honored veteran of the war of 1812. This union has been blessed with six children; those surviving are: **John G.**, a tinner, of Bellwood, Pa.; **Charles B.**, a postal clerk on the Pennsylvania railroad, running between New York and Pittsburg; and **Harry H.**, a graduate of the institution at Bloomington, Ill., and a resident of

Great Falls, Mont. The deceased children are: **Ellie B. (Mrs. B. F. Bryan)**, of Rochester, N. Y. ; **Susie E.**, who died single; and **Edward P.**, who died at home, March 24, 1897.

At the call of the citizens of the town, **Captain Ewing** has ably filled the office of school director for fifteen years. He has also been constable, member of the town council, and auditor. He is a member of McVeytown Lodge, No. 376, F. and A. M., at McVeytown; and of Aughwick Lodge, No. 472, I. O. O. F. Of the latter organization the **Captain** is the oldest living member, having been connected with the lodge during forty-four years, in which time he has drawn exactly two weeks' benefits. He is a consistent member of the Presbyterian Church, and has been for nearly all of his adult life, a teacher in the Sunday school. The Captain is a Republican to the backbone. The annals of **Captain Ewing's** life illustrate in a remarkable degree, the truth of the couplet.

"Honor and fame from no condition rise: Act well your part; there all the honor lies."

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