

Commemorative Biographical Record of Central Pennsylvania, Centre, Clinton, Union and Snyder County, Chicago, J. H. Beers and Company, 1898

Hon. John Mitchell, who was for years a distinguished citizen of Bellefonte, Centre County, was a son of **Gen. David Mitchell**, of Cumberland County (now Perry), who was for some twenty-two years a member of the Legislature. **John Mitchell** was born about two miles from Newport, Perry County, March 8, 1791. When quite a boy he went with his father on his journey to the meetings of the Legislature to bring the horses home, and returned for him in the spring. He had little schooling, but a great capacity for mathematics. One of the members gave him a book, and told him he must run lines all over the farm before his return in the spring, which he did, being only about fourteen years of age. He came to Centre County in 1800, and engaged with John Dunlop as a clerk in the iron works. In May, 1814, he was married to the widow of **Col. W. W. Miles** (nee **Annie Boggs**), and then entered into the mercantile business with his brother **David**, in Bellefonte. In October, 1818, he was elected sheriff of Centre County, and as such became the executioner of Munks. **Mr. Mitchell's** ability as a surveyor and engineer was so universally recognized that he became constantly employed in such services. In 1821 he laid out the Centre and Kishacoquillas turnpike and superintended its construction, and subsequently as engineer located many of the turnpikes, in the middle and northern portions of the State. In the fall of 1822 he was elected to the Assembly, and re-elected in 1823. When elected to Congress the first time, in 1824, he was in the mountains surveying, and returned the second day after the election. He had been gone three weeks, and **James M. Petrikin** was about starting out to hunt him up and inform him of it. In October, 1826, when he ran the second time, there was but one vote against him in the Bellefonte box. This was attributed to **Mr. Norris**, brother-in-law of **John Brown**, one of the opposing candidates. He, however, denied the impeachment. In the summer of 1827, under the directions of the canal commissioners, he made a survey and examination of the proposed canal routes between the Susquehanna and Potomac, commencing at the mouth of the Conedoquinet, above Harrisburg, and running west as far as Green Village, in Franklin County; thence continued to Gettysburg, etc. In 1857 he was appointed engineer on the Erie extension, connecting with the Beaver division above New Castle, and running to Erie, superintending the construction of the French Creek feeder, which was the first part of the work. In 1829 he was appointed by the Legislature one of the canal commissioners, reappointed by Gov. Wolf in 1830, and continued in office until the advent of Gov. Ritner's administration. It was in this office that the peculiar talents of **Mr. Mitchell** shone most conspicuously. Possessing strong common sense, an intuitive sagacity, and a complete knowledge of mankind, he united with these qualities great coolness and discretion, an indefatigable perseverance, supported by an iron constitution. Accustomed from early life to endure privations, often voluntarily undergone, neither the storms of winter nor the heat of summer interfered with the steady performance of his duty. His habit was to get up before 5 o'clock in the morning, and do a large amount of brain work before breakfast. He was Presidential elector on the Van Buren and Johnston ticket in 1835, and after his removal by Gov. Ritner in 1837 he went into the iron business, the firm of John Mitchell & Co. owning and managing Hecla and Mill Hall Furnaces. He failed in that business in 1838, and in 1839 was appointed superintendent of the Beaver division of the Pennsylvania canal, and in 1842 removed from Centre County to Bridgewater, Beaver county.

In 1844, when **Francis R. Shunk**, who had been clerk of the canal board under **Mr. Mitchell**, was elected governor, he promised Mr. Mitchell the office of surveyor-general; but there being

factions in the Democratic party, and **Mr. Mitchell** standing with ex-Gov. Porter, Gov. Shunk regretted bitterly that he could not keep his word, saying he could not help it, and was forced by circumstances. On January 1, 1845, the State transferred the Beaver division to the Erie Canal Co. This company reappointed **Mr. Mitchell**, and in the performance of the duties of the office he passed the remainder of his days. The last days of his life were clouded by the death of his son **David**, who was wounded in battle in Mexico, and died at Perote. **Mr. Mitchell** died at Bridgewater, August 3, 1849, of cholera. His two children, **Mrs. Martha Kephart**, of Unionville, Centre County, and **Mrs. N. H. Dickson**, wife of **Dr. Joseph Dickson**, at Pittsburg, are both dead.

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