

Genealogical and Personal History of Fayette County, Pennsylvania. Under The Editorial Supervision of John W. Jordan, LL.D. Librarian of Pennsylvania Historical Society, Philadelphia and James Hadden, of Uniontown, Pennsylvania; author of "Washington and Braddock's Expeditions Through Fayette County," and the reproductions of Judge James Veech's work entitled "The Monongahela of Old, or Historical Sketches of Southwestern Pennsylvania to the Year 1800", Illustrated. Volume II.. New York, Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1912

**Searight.** Worthy deeds of noble men are the beacon lights of time. They create the atmosphere in which our race progresses as the years revolve. Every good action, whether it was performed last year or centuries ago, helps to make the present better than the past, and all finer minds are deeply stirred by the record of such actions nobly done. It has been truly said that any people who take no pride in the great achievements of remote ancestors will never accomplish anything worthy of remembrance by remote descendants. This is equally true of families and of individuals. The best and purest part of our human nature rises up in admiration and stands in honest pride before the record of good deeds done by those through whom we inherit life and being. Every soul worthy of his inheritance is ready and anxious to do what he may to perpetuate the memory of those who have "gone before," as well as to emulate their virtues and kindly benefactions.

In doing this he gathers strength for his own lifework and transmits inspiration to unborn generations. In it he finds pleasure and duty so strangely mingled as to form a composite whole, a complete and perfect unit. This natural feeling of reverence for worthy ancestors has led to many and varied attempts to give it adequate expression. Among these are compilations of family history and genealogy, which are met with quite frequently in recent years. The best example of this kind of work is an issued volume entitled "A Record of the **Searight family** in America."

Its contents comprise an ideal history of a family connection which now extends into half the states of the American Union, and has furnished some of the best, most useful and most distinguished citizens of the great Republic. Every branch is carefully traced, and all known facts regarding each member are succinctly given. The work also embraces a historical retrospect of this well known Scotch-Irish family as far back as the siege of Derry (1688), when a number of the **Searights** were engaged in the defense of that ancient stronghold, having espoused the cause of William, Prince of Orange, against James II.

The name was formerly spelled **Seawright**, and in its original form was **Sievewright** and **Seabright**. The **Searight** family is of Dalraidain Scotch-Irish origin, and has for its crest a thunderbolt and for its motto: Dciim tiniete (fear God). They are of that wonderful Scotch-Irish race which in its career among the nations of the earth has been fitly compared to the Gulf Stream in its course through the regions of the ocean. To trace the making of the Scotch-Irishman, one must follow a restless Celtic race from Gallatia into the British Isles, where they founded their great college of Icolmkill, and three centuries later planted the seed bed of the Scotch-Irish race in Strathclyde and in Northumbria. Here followed a Brito-Scot and Anglo-Norman fusion which in 1605 was transplanted into Ulster of the North of Ireland, and modified by the choicest elements of the Puritan, the Huguenot and Hollander, to form the Ulsterman, who then driven by persecution settled our western border and became the Scotch-Irishman of history,

named from the dominating strain of his blood and the land from which he came. He protected the borders from the Indians, fought in the Revolution (never produced a Tory), won the west, developed his great racial characteristics of independence, education and scriptural faith, and has fought in every war of the Republic. The descendants of **Sir Edward Seabright (Seawright, Searight)** went to Strathclyde, thence to Ulster, and some members of the family that settled in West Ulster served in the defense of Londonderry.

(I) One of the descendants above mentioned was **William Seawright**, born about 1720, came from county Donegal, North of Ireland, about the year 1740, and settled in Lampeter Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. He was at the time of his death (1771) a prominent citizen and landholder of that county. He sought religious liberty in the new world, where he was destined to found a family whose name should be written high on the rolls of fame in the new Republic whose birth he did not live to see. Shortly after his settlement in Pennsylvania, he married **Anne Hamilton**, a descendant of the powerful dukes of **Hamilton** of Scotland. She came from Belfast, Ireland, at the same time as her husband, and settled in about the same locality, near Lancaster City. She was accompanied to America by her brothers, **William** and **Hugh**, and a sister **Mary**. Her brother **William** was the grandfather of the distinguished governor of South Carolina in Calhoun's day, who was known as the Nullifier Governor, in consequence of his having advocated the nullification of certain laws passed by Congress, which he considered adverse to the interests of the people of the south. The ancestors of the **Hamilton family** came from Scotland to Belfast, Ireland, when it became the refuge for persecuted Covenanters. They were a part of the historical Scotch family of **Hamiltons**, one of whom was chosen as the husband of **Queen Mary**, and another as the husband of **Queen Elizabeth**. Family tradition and family history also teach that **Alexander Hamilton**, of Revolutionary fame, was connected with this same Lancaster County family of **Hamiltons**. Children of **William** and **Anne Seawright**: 1. **Mary**, married **John Glenn**; the **Glenns** are extinct, and are mostly buried in Pequea Churchyard, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. 2. **Esther**, married **Gilbert Seawright**, who was the founder of the large family of **Seawrights** in and around Carlisle, Cumberland County, Pennsylvania. 3. **Anne**, married **William Woods**, and removed from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, to Albemarle County, Virginia, where they died; two children: **Alexander** and **Seawright**, born in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania; they later settled in Fayette County, Kentucky, and subsequently removed to Illinois, where the former died in Jo Davies County, and the latter in Greene County. 4. **William**, of whom further. 5. **Alexander**, married a **Miss Logan**, and removed to Augusta County, Virginia; children: **William**, **Alexander** and **Margaret**, who removed with their families to Henry County, Tennessee, about the year 1826, where some of their descendants are living at the present time.

(II) **William** (2), son of **William** (1) **Seawright**, the American ancestor, was born in 1753, died in 1824. He learned the trade of fuller. He moved from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, to Augusta County, Virginia, returning to Pennsylvania later and settling in the Ligonier Valley, Westmoreland County, where he built and operated a fulling (cloth) mill until his death. He was a Presbyterian, like his father, and was for many years an elder of that church. He married, in 1784, **Jean**, daughter of **Samuel** and **Catherine (Seawright) Ramsey**. Children: 1. **Samuel**, married **Mary A. Wilson**, and after 1810 settled in Tippecanoe County, Indiana. 2. **Alexander**, married **Catherine Jones**, first settled in Brooke County, Virginia, and afterwards removed to Morgan County, Ohio. 3. **William**, of whom further. 4. **Mary**. 5. **John**. 6. **Hamilton**. 7.

**Archibald.** The four latter named remained in the Ligonier Valley and died without issue. They are buried by the side of their parents in Pleasant Grove graveyard, about five miles from the town of Ligonier. **Samuel Ramsey**, father of **Jean (Ramsey), Seawright**, was a man of wealth and gave largely of his means to aid the cause of independence. He was a prominent citizen of Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, and was the owner of the famous "Letort Springs" tract near Carlisle, where he lived and died. He married **Catherine Seawright**, daughter of **William Seawright**, who came from Donegal, Ireland, about 1740, and settled in Leacock Township, near Lancaster City, Pennsylvania, where he lived and died. He was for many years a landholder and prominent citizen of Lancaster County. In the revolution of 1688 the ancestors of **William Seawright** threw themselves into the cause of William of Orange. Some of them were driven within the walls of Londonderry when its gates were closed against James the Second, some afterwards died in the besieged city, while others of them survived the siege. **William Seawright** married **Catherine Jackson**, also a resident of the North of Ireland, and they were the parents of one child, **Catherine**, who married **Samuel Ramsey**, and they were the parents of children, namely: **Jean**, aforementioned as the wife of **William Seawright**; **Catherine**, died unmarried; **Margaret**, died unmarried; **Esther**, died unmarried; **Elizabeth**, died unmarried; **Samuel**, married a Gettysburg lady, no children; **Archibald**, married **Margaret Dean**, and their grandchildren are now residents of New Bloomfield, Perry County, Pennsylvania; **Seawright**, married a member of the Pittsburgh family of **Dennys**. After the death of his wife **Catherine**, **Samuel Ramsey** married (second) the **Widow Macfeely**, grandmother of **General Robert Macfeely**, commissary general of the United States army, Washington, D. C.



(Ill) **William (3) Seawright**, son of **William (2)** (q. v.) and **Jean (Ramsey) Seawright**, was born near Carlisle, Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, December 5, 1791, died August 12, 1852. He received a plain English education, but he was endowed with the precepts of stern integrity, industry and honor, the elements of his future success in business, and of his elevated character. He learned the trade of fuller and dyer of cloth. At the age of twenty-one years he came to Fayette County, Pennsylvania, his entire stock in trade being an expert knowledge of his trade, a keen sense of honor, and a stout heart. He arranged a lease of the Hammond fulling mill, later was a partner in the operation of the old Cook's mill, on Redstone Creek, operated another fulling mill at the mouth of Dunlap Creek, and subsequently rented another mill on the George Washington farm near Perryopolis. This was accomplished in a few years, the young man becoming the largest fulling mill owner and operator in Western Pennsylvania. He continued in business until, with rare foresight, seeing that the fulling mill must

fall before the modern factory system of the east, sold his milling interests and became one of the principal commissioners of the National Road and the Erie Extension of the Pennsylvania & Ohio Canal. He also purchased a farm and hotel on the National Road and founded the village of Seawrights, named in his honor, and there made his permanent settlement. He was gifted with rare sagacity, universal business ability, undaunted courage, became a leading business man of his

county, and was intimately connected with the foremost of her institutions. He was a man of sympathetic nature, and his private charities were many. He stood high in church and community life, all realizing in him a friend and counselor in whose fidelity they could with safety confide.

**Mr. Searight** was a prominent and zealous old-time Democratic politician, and wielded a wide influence. On one occasion he rode on horseback from Searights to Harrisburg, a distance of over two hundred miles, to assist in the preparation to nominate General Jackson for the presidency. He was an intimate friend of the late **Simon Cameron**, ex-United States senator from Pennsylvania, and had close political relations with the leading politicians of his day. In the early history of Fayette County, political conventions of both parties were accustomed to meet at Searights and plan campaigns. A memorable meeting, of which **Mr. Searight** was the chief instigator, was held there in 1828, known as the "Gray Meeting," from the name of the keeper of the hotel at that time, **John Gray**. At this meeting the Jackson and Adams men met to test their strength. They turned out in the meadow below the hotel, formed in rank and counted off, the Jackson men outnumbering their opponents decisively, and it was regarded as a great Jackson victory. In the political campaign of 1836 a large Democratic meeting was held at Uniontown, and the delegation from Searights bore a banner with the inscription, "Menallen the battle ground of the Gray Meeting."

The many similar political meetings with which **Mr. Searight** was identified prove the esteem in which he was held by the citizens of the county by all parties. But Fayette County, although the first, was but little in advance of other communities to learn and admire his worth. He early became known and appreciated throughout the entire state. He was appointed commissioner of the Cumberland Road (National Road) by Governor Porter, a position he held for many years. In 1854 he was superseded by Colonel William Hopkins, of Washington, Pennsylvania. Subsequently an act of the legislature placed the road in the hands of trustees appointed by the courts, and these trustees restored **William Searight** to the commissionership, the duties of which office he continued to discharge with great fidelity and industry. He was thoroughly familiar with all the hills and valleys of that grand old thoroughfare, once so stirring and active, but now still and grass-grown. Previous to his appointment as commissioner of the National Road he was a contractor on the same. He was one of the contractors who built the iron bridge over the mouth of Dunlap Creek, between Bridgeport and Brownsville, and was also a contractor on the Erie Extension of the Pennsylvania and Ohio Canal. At the time of his death he was the candidate of the Democratic Party for one of the most important offices in the state, that of canal commissioner. To this office he would have undoubtedly been elected; after his death, Colonel William Hopkins, of Washington County, was nominated by the Democratic Party for the same office, and was elected by a large majority.

**Mr. Searight** was a man of the most generous and humane character, ever ready to lend his counsel, his sympathies, and his purse, to the aid of others. Though a strong political party man, yet he always treated his opponents with courtesy. In religion he was like most of the race to which he belonged, imbued with Calvinism. The brightest traits of his character were exemplified in his last hours. So far as human judgment can decide he died a Christian. His aged widow often quoted an expression he made as he was approaching the sad realities of death, which gave her great comfort. It was this: "Our prayers have been answered; I feel that if I

should die tonight, the Lord will receive me into His Holy Kingdom." Although death plucked him from the very threshold of earthly honors, yet it caused him no regrets. The Kingdom into which he was about to enter presented higher honors and purer enjoyments. To him they offered:

"No midnight shade, no clouded sun.  
But sacred, high, eternal noon."

**Mr. Searight** married, March 25, 1826, **Rachel Brownfield**, born at Gainsboro, Frederick County, Virginia, February 7, 1805, daughter of **Thomas** and **Elizabeth Brownfield**, of Uniontown, Pennsylvania. Children: 1. **Thomas B.**, of whom further. 2. **Ewing B.**, of whom further. 3. **Jeabn**, of whom further. 4. **William**, of whom further. 5. **James Allison**, of whom further. 6. **Elizabeth S.**, of whom further.

**Mr. Searight** died at his residence in Menallen Township, August 12, 1852. A more emphatic eulogy than is in the power of language to express was bestowed upon him on the day of his funeral by the assembling around his coffin to perform the last sad duty of friendship of as great, if not a greater, number of citizens than ever attended the funeral ceremonies of anyone who had died within the limits of Fayette County. Among that vast assemblage were both the patriarchs of the county and the rising youth who came to give their testimony to the lofty worth in life of the distinguished dead. A few days after his death a large meeting of the citizens of Fayette County, irrespective of party, convened at the court house for the purpose of bearing suitable testimony to his memory and character. The following gentlemen were chosen officers: Hon. Nathaniel Ewing, president; Hon. Daniel Sturgeon (ex United States senator), and Z. Ludington, vice-presidents; John B. Krepps and R. P. Flenniken, secretaries. On motion of Hon. James Veech (later author of "Monongahela of Old") a committee of resolutions, composed of leading citizens, was appointed, which committee presented the following preamble and resolutions, which were unanimously adopted:

"When a valuable citizen died, it is meet that the community of which he was a member mourn his loss. A public expression of their sorrow at such an event is due as some solace to the grief of the bereaved family and friends, and as an incentive to others to earn for their death the same distinction.

"In the recent death of **William Searight**, this community has lost such a citizen. Such an event has called this public meeting, into which enter no schemes of political promotion, no partisan purposes of empty eulogy. Against all this, death has shut the door. While yet the tear hangs upon the cheek of his stricken family, and the tidings of death are unread by many of his friends, we his fellow-citizens, neighbors, friends, of all parties, have assembled to speak to those who knew and loved him best, and to those who knew him not, the words of sorrow and truth, in sincerity and soberness. Therefore as the sense of this meeting:

"Resolved, That in the death of **William Searight**, Fayette County and the commonwealth of Pennsylvania have lost one of their best and most useful citizens. The people at large may not realize their loss, but the community in which he lived, over whose comforts and interests were diffused the influences of his liberality and enterprise, feel it, while his friends, of all classes, parties and professions, to whom he clung, and who clung to him, mourn it.

"Resolved, That while we would withhold our steps from the sanctuary of domestic grief, we may be allowed to express to the afflicted widow and children of the deceased our unfeigned sorrow and sympathy in their great bereavement, and to tender them our assurance that while in their hearts the memory of the husband and father will ever be cherished, in our hearts will be kept the liveliest recollections of his virtues as a citizen and friend.

'Resolved, That among the elements which must enter into every truthful estimate of the character of **William Searight** are a warm amenity of manner, combined with great dignity of deportment which were not the less attractive by their plainness and want of ostentation; elevated feelings were pure than passionless: high purposes with untiring energy in their accomplishment: an ennobling sense of honor, and individual independence, which kept him always true to himself and his engagements: unfaltering fidelity to his friends: a liberality which heeded no restraint but means and merit: great promptness and fearlessness in the discharge of what he believed to be a duty, private or public, guided by a rigid integrity, which stood all tests and withstood all temptations; honesty and truthfulness in word and deed, which no seductions could weaken or assaults overthrow, in all respects the architect of his own fortune and fame. These, with the minor virtues in full proportion are some of the outlines of character which stamped the man whose death we mourn, as one much above the ordinary level of his race.

"Resolved, That while we have here nothing to do or say as to the loss sustained by the political party to which he belonged, and whose candidate he was for an office of great honor and responsibility, we may be allowed to say that had he lived and been successful with a heart so rigidly set as was his, with feelings so high and integrity so firm, and withal an amount of practical intelligence so ample as he possessed, his election could have been regretted by no citizen who knew him, and who placed the public interests beyond selfish ends and party success. As a politician we knew him to hold to his principles and party predilections with a tenacious grasp, yet he was ever courteous and liberal in his deportment and views toward his political opponents.

'Resolved, That in the life and character of **William Searight** we see a most instructive and encouraging example. Starting the struggle of life with an humble business, poor and unbefriended, with an honest mind and a true heart, with high purposes and untiring industry, he by degrees gained friends and means which never forsook him. He thus won for himself and family ample wealth, and attained a position among his fellowmen which those who have not had the best advantages our country affords, might well envy. That wealth and that position he used with a just liberality and influence for the benefit of all around and dependent upon him. Though dead, he yet speaketh to every man in humble business: 'Go thou and do likewise, and such shall be thy reward in life and in death.'

"Resolved, That the proceedings of this meeting be furnished for publication in all the papers of the county and a copy thereof, signed by the officers, be presented to the family of the deceased."

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