

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES.

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### CHARLES WILLIAMSON.

CHARLES WILLIAMSON was a native of Belgray, in the County of Dumfries, Scotland. He enlisted in the British army early in life, and during the American Revolution held the commission of Captain in the 25th Regiment of foot. The regiment was ordered to America, but the vessel upon which it embarked was captured near the Atlantic coast by a French privateer, and Captain Williamson was carried to Boston, where he remained a prisoner until the close of the war. He then married, returned to Scotland, made the tour of the Continent, and returned to England. Here he made the acquaintance of some of the leading men and statesmen of England, and his knowledge of American affairs, together with his expressed desire to return hither, pointed him out as a suitable person for agent of the London "Association," just organized for the purchase and settlement of lands in America. The "Association" was generally known in America as the "Pulteney Estate." He sailed for this country, accompanied by two intelligent Scotchmen, John Johnston and Charles Cameron, as assistants. Northumberland, Pennsylvania, was the headquarters of his correspondence during the preliminary arrangements to the settlement. From this place a road was opened through the forest, via Blossburgh, thence down the Tioga to Painted Post; thence up the Canisteo to Hornellsville; thence to Dansville, and down the Canascraga to Genesee River. The attempt to establish a German Colony at the last named place proved a failure. In 1794, when the British Governor of Canada threatened to drive out the settlers in Western New York, Mr. Williamson received the commission of Colonel from the Governor of New York. He was elected a member of the State Legislature in 1796, and for three succeeding years; and for

ten years exerted a greater influence over Western New York than almost any other man. At the close of his agency, in 1801, Col. Williamson returned to England, but afterwards visited America occasionally. He died in 1807, while on a mission from the British Government to Havana. Col. Williamson was a man of spirit, energy and great versatility of talent. Prepossessing in person, easy and frank in manner, of generous and friendly disposition, he readily won the hearts of the young pioneers who opened his roads, felled his forests and erected his buildings. He could easily adapt himself to the circumstances of all men, and was welcomed alike to the palace of the peer and the cabin of the backwoodsman. He is described as "dark of feature, tall, slender and erect of figure. His habits were active, and he pleased the foresters by vaulting lightly to his saddle, and scouring the woods at full gallop." One of the early settlers, and an influential man in the County, says, "He was a gentleman in every sense of the word. He was well qualified for the duties conferred upon him as agent of such an immense estate, and for the settlement and growth of a new country, so long as Sir William Pulteney would furnish the means to improve it."

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### CEN. GEORGE McCLURE.

GEORGE McCLURE, one of the early settlers of Steuben County, was born in the north of Ireland in 1770. His ancestors were "Scotch Covenanters," who emigrated from their native country to escape the cruel persecution to which they were exposed. From the age of four years till he was fifteen, he attended school, and then learned the trade of a carpenter. At the age of twenty he resolved to come to America, and soon after embarked on board the ship *Mary*, of Londonderry, for Baltimore. After a quick and pleasant passage of five weeks, he landed in Baltimore, his whole property consisting of "three suits of clothing, three dozen linen shirts and a chest of tools." He commenced work at his trade the next day after landing, and worked two months for seventy-five dollars. This he thought a good beginning, and "better than to have remained in Ireland, and worked for two shillings and sixpence a day." Desiring to see more of the land of liberty, he started on foot to visit some relatives near Chambersburgh, Penn., leaving his baggage to be sent by the first opportunity presented. There were no stages at this time except between large places, the trade of the backwoods being carried on by pack-horses. He remained in the vicinity of Chambersburgh till the spring of 1793, when he discovered an advertisement signed by Charles William-

son, offering steady employment and good wages to mechanics and laborers to go to the "Genesee Country." Mr. McClure immediately set out for Northumberland, but on his arrival learned that Captain W. had started with a company to open a road through the wilderness to his place of destination, 140 miles distant. McClure had an uncle near Northumberland, at whose house he remained until he heard of Williamson's arrival at Bath. Having persuaded his uncle to accompany him, they started, each mounted on a good horse, with "provisions enough for a four weeks' journey." They had traveled about twenty miles when they arrived at a stream so swollen by recent rains that it was impossible to ford it. The uncle was faint-hearted, and declared he would go no further. At length a canoe was discovered, and they decided to cross in that and let their horses swim by its side. The passage was made in safety. Other similar difficulties presented themselves, but all were surmounted, and in due time they arrived at Bath. For a time he was employed to work at his trade by Col. Williamson, but afterwards engaged in various enterprises, some of which are mentioned in connection with the towns in which they were located. There was scarcely any branch of business in which he did not engage with greater or less success. During the war of 1812-15 he held a commission of Major General, and was in active service. He held most of the offices of the County at different times, being Justice of the Peace, Judge of the Court of Common Pleas, Surrogate and High Sheriff. He was Post Master of Bath for about eight years, and for three years in succession represented the people of Steuben in the State Legislature. In 1834 he removed to Elgin, Illinois, where he resided till his death in 1851.

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### BENJAMIN PATTERSON.

One of the characters of Steuben County from its earliest settlement, was BENJAMIN PATTERSON. He was born in Loudon County, Virginia, in 1759. His mother was a cousin of Daniel Boone, the first settler of Kentucky. Early in life he removed to Pennsylvania, and here, amidst its wilds, formed a taste for hunting and the exciting life which he afterwards followed. During the Revolutionary war he served in a rifle corps, organized for the defense of the border, and in this service met with many exciting adventures. Sometimes he was scouting among the most fearless; sometimes skirmishing in the forests with the wily savage, and

sometimes acting as guide to travelers and emigrants in the wild woods of the Genesee. For many years his home was near Northumberland, on the west branch of the Susquehanna; but the advent of farmers, the clearing of land and the destruction of game, induced him to leave those haunts for the more congenial ones of the deeper forest, where he would not be disturbed by the woodman's ax. In 1796 he boated his goods up the river to Painted Post, and kept for seven years the old tavern at Knoxville. He then moved up two miles above Painted Post, to a farm, which the first year produced a crop of "twenty-two wolves, nine panthers, a few bears, deer, shad and salmon in countless numbers." He possessed great physical strength, and was never worsted in a hand to hand encounter. It is related that a party of Indians, with a few white men, had gathered around a fire, near the Genesee, when the savages began to insult and abuse a white man who stood by, and presently threw him into the fire. He scrambled out, and was again thrown into the fire by the Indians. Patterson, a stranger to them, standing near, sprang forward and dragged the man from the fire, saying "Don't burn the man alive!" Several of the party then stepped forward and assaulted the hunter, but turned him over to Jones, the interpreter, who was supposed to have no equal in a rough and tumble fight. Jones was badly beaten, and kept his wigwam for several days. Patterson retained to old age a love for the sports of his youth, and found his chief pleasure in their pursuit. When attending Court at Bath, as a jurymen, he was in the habit of going out early in the morning and shooting a deer before breakfast. When an old man, and living upon his farm upon the Tioga, and game was becoming scarce, he was accustomed to lay aside his rifle every year when he had killed a hundred deer. He was a man of keen observation, of remarkable memory, of good judgment, intelligent, and of strict integrity. He possessed great powers of narration, interesting not only the rough frontier men, but the educated and refined. The late Chief Justice Spencer once met him, and was so interested in his conversation that he sat up all night to listen to his narrations, and afterwards, whenever he was holding Court at Bath, would send for Patterson, provide for him at the hotel, and pass as much time as possible with him when off the bench. Patterson died at Painted Post, in 1830.

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### COL. IRA DAVENPORT.

COL. IRA DAVENPORT was born at Spencertown, Columbia County, N. Y., September 29th, 1795. At the age of fourteen he went

to Harpersfield, Delaware County, to act as clerk in a store in which his father had an interest. Here he remained till 1815, the 21st year of his age, when he commenced business for himself. With a single wagon load of goods, he drove three hundred miles, to the little backwoods village of Hornellsville, built a store with his own hands and commenced the sale of the merchandise brought with him. Col. Davenport remained in business at Hornellsville, engaging in all the business enterprises of the times, till 1847. He had stores at Baker's Bridge, Angelica, Burns, Canisteo, North Almond, Hammondsport, Dansville, Almond, Independence, and was also a partner in a mercantile house, and in a coal company in New York. He was also largely engaged in running lumber and arks down the river from Hornellsville. In 1847 removed to Bath and there resided till his death, May 20, 1868. While in life he was known as an enterprising and successful business man; he will be known to posterity as the founder of the "Davenport Institution for Female Orphan Children." He began to erect a building designed for children of this class in 1861. In 1863 the corporation was organized, and July 19th, 1864, the first orphan was received into the Institution. Col. Davenport conveyed to the Corporation sixty-five acres of the Cameron farm, in the village of Bath, with the main building of the Institution, which cannot be valued less than \$75,000. Besides this he endowed it with funds to the amount of \$100,000, to which his brother, Mr. Charles Davenport, added \$30,000. Additions to the building are already in process of erection. By his will, Col. Davenport left the further sum of \$50,000 to the Institution, making in all \$225,000 for the support of orphan girls.

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We clip the following from an article in the Knickerbocker Magazine, showing the characteristics of some of the early magistrates of the County:

"Among them was a jolly old Virginian, Judge H—, a sportsman of the old school of buff breeches and fair top-boots, well known throughout the country for genial habits and generous hospitality. He had been appointed a Judge of the Court of Common Pleas. Though little versed in legal technicalities, he possessed a fund of genuine common sense, which made him a good Judge. On one occasion, in the absence of the first Judge, it fell to him to charge the Grand Jury. The substance of the charge, so characteristic of the man and of his opinions, is here given:

*Gentlemen of the Grand Jury:*—In the absence of the first Judge, it becomes my duty to address you. If you expect much of a charge, you will be disappointed, as it will be nothing but a squib. I see among you many gentlemen who understand the duties of Grand Jurors much better than I do. I need only say, then, you know your duties, go ahead and perform them. The Sheriff has handed me his criminal calendar, by which it appears he has five poor devils in jail for various offenses; two of them are for horse-stealing. Now, gentlemen, there are grades in crime, and common sense would indicate that the punishment should be in proportion to the criminality of the offense, as exhibited by the circumstances of each case. That I suppose is the law; if it is not, it ought to be so. You will understand what I mean by this, when I inform you that one of these scamps stole a slab-sided Yankee mare, while the other took a Virginia blood-horse. Two others are indicted for mayhem. One of them for biting off a negro's nose, which I think exhibits a most depraved appetite; the other for gouging out an Irishman's eye, a most ungentlemanly way of fighting. I hope you will look well to these fellows. The last is a poor cuss who stole a jug of whisky. The article is so plenty and cheap that it may be had by asking, anywhere, and stealing it is the meanest kind of offense, and deserves the severest punishment that the law will permit. The great men at Albany have made it our special duty to charge you in regard to private lotteries. What is the mighty crime involved in this business I cannot see, when hustling and pitching coppers is tolerated; but I suppose they know, and as the law makes it our duty, I charge you to look out for them. Sheriff, select two constables, and march these men off to their duties.'"