



Haverford Township Historical Society



GEORGE SMITH, M. D. (1804-1882)

Compiled by Richard D. Kerr

[The following is excerpted from Biographical and Historical Cyclopedia of Delaware County, Pennsylvania by Samuel T. Wiley and Winfield Scott Garner, published by Gresham Publishing Company in Richmond, Indiana and New York in 1894.]

GEORGE SMITH, M. D., the early historian of Delaware county, was born in Haverford township, this county, February 4, 1804. He was graduated from the University of Pennsylvania, and practiced medicine at Darby for about five years. He then retired from active practice and gave his time to the management of his farm, and to the prosecution of literary and scientific studies. He was active, prominent, and useful in the scientific, political, and educational affairs of his county. He served two terms as an associate judge of the county, and one term as a State senator, during which he drafted the bill for the common schools of Pennsylvania. He served for several years as superintendent of the common schools of the county, and was one of the founders and the first president of the Delaware County Institute of Science. In 1862 Dr. Smith published his "History of Delaware County," a work that preserves his name for all time to come in his native county. "On the morning of February 24, 1882, full of years and honor, Dr. George Smith passed into eternity, leaving the world the better that he had lived."

[The following is excerpted and adapted from A History of Delaware County, Pennsylvania and Its People, John W. Jordan, editor, published by Lewis Historical Publishing Company, New York in 1914.]

The late **DR. GEORGE SMITH**, well known as the author of the "History of Delaware County, Pennsylvania," was fifth in descent from **RICHARD HAYES**, a Friend, who with his wife, Issatt, emigrated from Ilmiston, Pembrokeshire, Wales, in 1687, and settled on a tract of land in Haverford township, which is still owned and occupied by their descendants. Their son, **RICHARD HAYES JR.**, was for nearly thirty years a member of the Provincial Assembly, was a justice of the courts of Chester county, served for a long time as one of the commissioners of the Loan Office, and held many responsible public trusts. He married a daughter of Henry Lewis, of Narberth, South Wales, who in 1682, accompanied by two of his friends, made the first settlement in Haverford township, where he gave much of his time to civil affairs and acts of benevolence. Dr. Smith was also descended from Dr. Thomas Wynne, of Caer-Wys, North Wales, the friend and physician of William Penn, and was in direct descent also from Dr. Edward Jones, of Merion, and was a lineal descendant of Robert and Jane Owen, that brave pair who, whether as Lord and Lady of Beaumaris Castle, or for conscience sake, within the gates of Dolgelley jail, commanded the admiration and respect of all about them, and whose ancestry is traced by their relative, the learned antiquary, Robert Vaughan, of Hengwrt, back to the sixth century.

GEORGE SMITH, grandfather of Dr. George Smith, married Elizabeth Hayes, daughter of Benjamin Hayes, a son of Richard Hayes Jr., above mentioned, and their son, **BENJAMIN HAYES SMITH** [August 11, 1765-April 24, 1806], father of Dr. George Smith, represented Delaware county in the legislature of Pennsylvania in 1801-02-03-04, and was appointed justice of the peace by Governor McKean, although politically opposed to him, and continued to the time of his death, in 1806, to hold that, as well as other

positions of public trust. He married Margaret (died August 29, 1851, aged 76 years), daughter of George and Mary (Curry) Dunn, and they were the parents of two children: Elizabeth Hayes Smith, born May 22, 1802, married Dr. Isaac Anderson; and George Smith, of whom further.

DR. GEORGE SMITH was born in Haverford township, Delaware county, Pennsylvania, February 12, 1804, died at his residence in Upper Darby, Pennsylvania, March 10, 1882, He was brought up in Radnor and Haverford townships; and educated in the day schools of the neighborhood and at the boarding school of Jonathan Gause, in Chester county, Pennsylvania. He then entered the Medical Department of the University of Pennsylvania, and received his degree of Doctor of Medicine, April 7, 1826. He followed his profession for five years in Darby and its vicinity, and then retired from active practice as a physician to enter upon that wider field of public usefulness for which his tastes and cast of mind eminently fitted him. His only business from this time forth was that of farming, he coming into possession of a very considerable estate, and performing the duties of numerous public and private trusts. In his farming operations he took great pleasure, and at the time of his decease was one of the largest land owners in the county. The execution of all trusts confided to him, whether public or private, was carried out upon the strictest principles of integrity.

He served as State senator in the Pennsylvania legislature for the district composed of Chester and Delaware counties from 1832 to 1836, and during that time was largely instrumental in establishing a permanent law for free education, a measure which had long been near his heart, and of which he had been for many years an earnest advocate. As chairman of the senate committee on education, he drew up a bill embracing the whole subject of public schools, and, supported by Thaddeus Stevens and Governor Wolfe, it was passed substantially as reported by him, and proved to be the first practical and efficient measure on the subject of general education in the State of Pennsylvania. On December 8, 1836, he was appointed by Governor Ritner associate-judge of the courts of Delaware county, an appointment held by him for six years, and renewed by popular vote for five succeeding years from the first Monday of December, 1861. Not being bred to the law, his position was that of lay-judge. He was the first superintendent of common schools in Delaware county under the Act of May 8, 1854, being chosen by the school directors of the county on the first Monday in June of that year, in accordance with the provisions of that act. For twenty-five years he was president of the school board of Upper Darby school district, during all of which period he devoted his time and energies to the development and improvement of the system of public instruction, which he had labored so zealously to establish.

In private official capacity, he was president of the Delaware County Turnpike Road Company from its incorporation in 1845 until within a few months of his death. In September, 1833, with four of his friends, he founded the Delaware County Institute of Science, of which he was president from the time of its organization until his death, a period of forty-nine years. This association, the object of which is to promote the study and diffusion of general knowledge and the establishment of a museum, is in many respects similar to the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, and, in Dr. Smith's own words, was enabled to accomplish most if not all the objects contemplated in its establishment. The institute was incorporated February 8, 1836, and the following year a hall was built in Upper Providence, where the meetings of the Institute have since been held and its Museum located. The latter embraces an important collection of specimens in every department of the natural sciences, particularly such as are calculated to illustrate the natural history of the county. To perfect this collection, Dr. Smith presented to the Museum his valuable herbarium. It was in connection with this body and under its auspices that he prepared and published the "History of Delaware County, Pennsylvania, from the Discovery of the Territory included within its limits to the present time; with a notice of the Geology of the County and Catalogues of its Minerals, Plants, Quadrupeds and Birds." This work is an octavo volume of nearly six hundred pages, with several maps and illustrations, and was issued in the year 1862. In addition to the

contents as set forth in this title, the volume contains seventy-six pages of biographical notices of persons identified with the county. Upon this is largely based the historical portion of the present work. Dr. Smith held the pen of a ready writer, and contributed numerous controversial articles to the local press on the removal of the seat of justice from Chester to Media, and upon other subjects. He also published "An Account of the Great Rainstorm and Flood of 1843," and an essay demonstrating the fitness of the stone quarried at Leiper's Quarry, in Delaware county, for use in erecting the Delaware Breakwater.

Dr. Smith was a member of Haverford Friends' Meeting; he was a regular attendant upon the sessions of religious worship at his meeting, and for many years had charge of the First-day school connected with it, in the welfare of which he always took the liveliest interest. He was a member of the Medical Society of Philadelphia, the American Philosophical Society, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania State Agricultural Society, the Contributors to the Pennsylvania Hospital, honorary member of the Numismatic and Antiquarian Society of Philadelphia, and corresponding member of the Historical Genealogical Society of New England, formerly an active and at the time of his death an honorary member of the Delaware County Medical Society.

Dr. Smith married, February 26, 1829, in the city of Philadelphia, Mary Lewis [November 26, 1808-June 23, 1892], daughter of Abraham and Rebecca (Lawrence) Lewis. Children:

1. Abraham Lewis Smith, an able and most highly esteemed member of the Delaware County bar, and also of the Philadelphia bar;
2. Mary Wood Smith [February 18, 1834-January 10, 1885, she did not marry];
3. Rebecca Smith, died February 8, 1856 [aged 19 years, 8 months, 18 days];
4. Margaretta Smith [June 5, 1838-December 25, 1915];
5. Benjamin Hayes Smith, a surveyor and civil engineer, held an important and responsible position in the Surveyor General's office at Denver, Colorado, for several years;
6. Clement Lawrence Smith, [born April 13, 1844] died July 1, 1909, was a professor in Harvard College, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and in March, 1882, was appointed Dean of the college;
7. George Smith Jr., died March 21, 1872;
8. Richard Hayes Smith, died September 18, 1856 [aged 14 years, 8 months, 18 days].

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