

BIOGRAPHY OF GOVERNOR WILSON SHANNON.

[For the principal portion of this biography, the Historical Society is indebted to the able address of Hon. Benjamin F. Simpson, in the proceedings in the Supreme Court of Kansas, on the death of Governor Shannon.]

Wilson Shannon, the second Governor of Kansas Territory, was born on the 24th day of February, 1802, in the Territory of Ohio, in what is now the southwest portion of the county of Belmont. He was the youngest of a family of nine children, seven boys and two girls. In the winter of 1803 his father was frozen to death, while on a hunting expedition in the then wilderness bordering on the Ohio river. The widowed mother was thus left with this large family of children, to struggle alone with the world as best she could, the oldest child, John, then being but nineteen years of age. The sterling character developed in this eldest son proved him to be almost equal to the emergency of supplying the place of his father. He labored incessantly to procure means with which to educate his brothers and sisters, this labor of love never being interrupted but once, and that for a patriotic service in the army, during the war of 1812. In this short service he attained the rank of captain. He might have attained high position in civil life, but for his manly devotion to the interests of his brothers.

George, the second son, while yet a lad, joined Lewis and Clark's expedition to the Rocky Mountains, and while on the Upper Missouri river, in an engagement with the Indians, was wounded in the leg, and on his arrival at St. Charles had it amputated. He was taken to Philadelphia by Lewis and Clark, and had charge of the publication of their journal. While there he studied law, was admitted to the bar, and afterwards located in Lexington, Kentucky. Able as the bar was there, in a few years he was chosen Circuit Judge, and served in that capacity for three years. In 1828 he went to Missouri and located at Hannibal; was sent to the State Senate, made United States District Attorney for Missouri, and was a candidate for the United States Senate against Thomas H. Benton at the time of his second reelection. He was a celebrated criminal-law lawyer, and in August, 1836, while engaged in the defense of a man charged with murder, he died, in the court house at Palmyra, in the forty-ninth year of his age, having been born in Pennsylvania in 1787. The Legislature of Missouri, shortly after his death, named a county in the southern part of the State for him.

By the time George had become fairly established in practice at Lexington he was joined by James, the third son, whom John had educated and sent out into the world. James, it is said, was the most brilliant of all the brothers. He practiced law with great success at Lexington for ten years, and became prominent as a political leader, but the Whig majorities were

too great to be overcome, and he, being a Democrat, was always defeated for local position.

While residing at Lexington he married a daughter of ex-Governor Shelby; and on the 9th day of February, 1832, the President commissioned him as Charge d'Affaires to the Federation of Central America, but he died before reaching his post.

In the meantime, Thomas, the fourth son, by the aid of the devoted John, had embarked in merchandise at Barnesville, a growing town near the homestead, and was remarkably successful. He twice represented Belmont county in the Legislature, and in the fall of 1826, the same year in which Wilson was admitted to the bar, he was elected to Congress from that district. Serving out his term of two years, he retired from politics, and from that time on never wearied in pushing the fortunes of his youngest brother.

David, the fifth son, studied law with George at Lexington, and after his admission settled in Tennessee, where he practiced with success until President Jackson appointed him a Judge in the Territory of Florida, but he died before he could close his business to accept the place. Arthur, the sixth son, died when quite young.

The faithful John, aided by Thomas, now a member of the Legislature, took Wilson from the farm in his nineteenth year and sent him to the Ohio University, at Athens, for two years; then he was sent to Lexington, where he could board with George and James, and enter Transylvania University. While there he studied law with his brothers, and in 1826 came back to St. Clairsville for admission and practice. Surrounded by able lawyers, his diligence soon secured him a profitable practice, and he then married a daughter of E. Ellis, Esq., Clerk of the Court, and this allied him to a family powerful both at the bar and in political circles.

Among the brothers-in-law through this alliance was William Kennon, member of Congress from Ohio from 1834 to 1836, a member of the constitutional convention of 1850, a commissioner to revise the code, and afterwards, for years, on the Supreme Bench of Ohio; another is the Hon. George W. Manypenny, a leading public man in Ohio, and who was at the time of the organization of Kansas Territory, United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs; another is Hon. Hugh J. Jewett, at one time a member of Congress from Ohio, and afterward president of the New York & Erie Railway; another was the late Hon. Isaac E. Eaton, so long a respected and well-known citizen of Kansas, who died at Leavenworth a few years since, where he had long years resided.

In the fall of 1832, Wilson Shannon had become so well known as an able and popular young lawyer, that the Democrats of his district nominated him for Congress. The district was strongly Whig, but Shannon reduced the usually large majority of that party to only thirty-seven, which was received by his opponent, Gen. James M. Bell, a renowned lawyer of Cambridge, Guernsey county. In 1832 Shannon was elected County Attorney of his native county, by a large majority.

His first wife lived only a few years after her marriage, and Mr. Shannon subsequently married Miss Sarah Osbun, of Cadiz, Harrison county, Ohio. This devoted woman shared the fortunes of her husband through the long and eventful career which followed, and survived him, dying at Lawrence, Kansas, January 5th, 1881.

During the early years of the public life of Mr. Shannon, his conduct was such that the young Democrats throughout the State began to regard him as their leader, and when the Democratic clans mustered in Columbus, in the summer of 1838, the young lawyer from Belmont was made their candidate for Governor. The Whigs renominated "Honest Old Joe Vance," who was then serving a term as chief magistrate of the State that he had wrested from one of the most popular of the old Democratic leaders. But Shannon received a majority of the votes cast, and a boy born in the Territory was declared Governor of the State—the first native Governor.

The Whig triumph of 1840, in the election of William Henry Harrison of Ohio to the Presidency, also gave the Governorship of that State to the Whig candidate—Thomas Corwin—and Shannon was beaten for reelection. But two years later the tables turned, and the Democrats transposed the words of a Whig rhyme of a former campaign, and sang:

"Wilson Shannon gave a tanning
To Tom the wagoner boy."

On the 9th of April, 1844, President Tyler commissioned Governor Shannon as Minister to Mexico. This position he accepted, and held until May 14, 1845, when the Mexican war impending, diplomatic intercourse was suspended, and demanding his passports, he returned home.

In 1849, becoming enlisted in the California gold excitement, he went to that new Territory. But in two years he returned to Ohio, and in 1852 was elected to Congress from the district composed of his native county and three others. He cast his vote in the House of Representatives, in 1854, in favor of the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska bill. He was not a candidate for reelection.

On the removal of Governor Reeder from the office of Governor of Kansas Territory, in August, 1855, the vacant office was tendered to Hon. John L. Dawson, of Pennsylvania, who declined the appointment. Governor Shannon was commissioned Governor of Kansas Territory by President Pierce, August 10, 1855. He arrived at Westport, Missouri, on the borders of Kansas, September 1, the second day after the adjournment of the first Territorial Legislature, which had held its sessions at Shawnee Mission, near Westport. He took the oath of office before Secretary Woodson, and entered upon his official duties on the 7th of September.

The period at which Governor Shannon entered upon his duties was a very exciting one, making the Governor's office one of greater trial, perhaps, than had ever before been allotted to high public functionary in this country. The interest of the whole Nation had become enlisted in the Kansas

struggle. The struggle had become a national partisan one of the greatest magnitude. The Democratic party of the country had become committed to the work of establishing slavery in Kansas. The opposing party had become equally determined that slavery should be excluded. In Kansas and western Missouri, whatever had been former party affiliations, they now were broken down, and all the people had become enlisted in intense antagonism, under the names Pro-Slavery and Free-State.

Governor Shannon had come to Kansas as a Democrat. His life-long fidelity to the Democratic party, and the many honors which had been conferred upon him by it, had wedded him to strict obedience to its policy, whatever the deliberations of its councils may have determined that to be. He had accepted the office of Governor without a thought of any other than of strict good faith to his party.

As a lawyer of profound learning and large experience, he had been educated to accept the legal maxim that judicial and executive functions must be exercised in strict regard to the laws, *de facto*—to the law as at present found on the statute book; leaving it to the future for the people to change the laws, if by any means they existed in contravention of their will freely exercised by ballot.

The Governor had had nothing to do with the election of March 30, 1855. If that election had been carried by voters from Missouri, and not by the legal voters of the Territory, he was not responsible for the fact, nor responsible for the character of the laws framed by the Legislature which had thus been elected, however much those laws might be intended to operate to the harassment and the exclusion from the Territory of settlers of Free-State sentiment. The remedy left to the class to whose disadvantage the laws operated, was to be found in future elections, through which might be brought about the removal of whatever of obnoxious legislation might have been placed on the statute book. As the highest executive authority in the Territory, it was his duty to execute the laws as he found them. Such appear to have been Governor Shannon's views of policy and duty upon entering upon his office.

In the necessary circumstances of the case, Governor Shannon was thrown into constant and exclusive association with those persons who were intensely wedded to the established policy of the Pro-Slavery party. He was sympathetic and confiding in his nature. Hence he was not unfrequently misled by wrong information and great exaggeration of fact, constantly presented to him. Added to this, his instructions from Washington came from a cabinet devoted to the policy of establishing slavery in Kansas at all hazards. Whatever of error or mistake may have occurred in his administration must be attributed largely to these peculiar conditions by which he was environed. The more authentic facts of his administration are to be gleaned from official records, a considerable portion of which are found in this volume.

His official services terminated with his resignation, which was forwarded to the President from Lecompton, August 18th, 1856. He continued to reside at Lecompton, whither the executive office had been removed in the spring of 1856. He entered actively into the practice of the law, in the higher courts of the Territory. Subsequently he removed to Lawrence, where he continued to live, leading a life of unblemished purity, and continuing to be the leading member of his profession in Kansas until the day of his death, which occurred peacefully at his home on the 30th day of August, 1877.

The children of Governor Shannon, now living, are Hon. Osbun Shannon, of Lawrence, Kansas, and Mrs. S. R. Keeler and Mrs. John A. Walsh, both residing in Washington, D. C.

EXECUTIVE MINUTES.

MINUTES RECORDED IN THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE DURING THE ADMINISTRATION OF
GOVERNOR WILSON SHANNON, INCLUDING ALSO THOSE RECORDED IN
THE INTERVALS IN WHICH SECRETARY DANIEL WOOD-
SON WAS ACTING GOVERNOR.

[Daniel Woodson took the oath of office, as Secretary of Kansas Territory, at Washington, D. C., September 28th, 1854. At different times during his term of office, he had devolved upon him the powers of Governor of the Territory. The organic act provided that, "In case of the death, removal, resignation, or absence of the Governor from the Territory, the Secretary shall be, and he is hereby authorized and required, to execute and perform all the powers and duties of the Governor during such vacancy or absence, or until another Governor shall be duly appointed and qualified to fill such vacancy."

The first occasion in which either of the exigencies contemplated by the act occurred, was that of the absence of Governor Reeder, on a visit to the East, from April 17th to June 23d, 1855. The Executive Minutes show only two official acts during this period—one, May 29th, that of filing election returns, for the action of the Governor upon his return to the Territory; the other, the issuing of an executive warrant, on a requisition from the Governor of the State of Indiana.

On the removal of Governor Reeder from office, August 16th, 1855, Secretary Woodson became acting Governor, and served till September 7th, 1855, when Governor Shannon took the oath of office and entered upon its duties. On the departure of Governor Shannon on a visit to St. Louis, June 24th, 1856, Secretary Woodson again became Acting Governor, and served until July 7th, possibly later. The minutes do not show the day of the return of Governor Shannon. On the resignation of Governor Shannon, August 18, 1856, Secretary Woodson again became Acting Governor, and served until September 11th, when Governor John W. Geary assumed the duties of the office. On the departure of Governor Geary from the Territory, March 12th, 1857, Mr. Woodson again became Acting Governor, and continued as such until April 16th, when he was succeeded by Frederick P. Stanton, who had been appointed Secretary of the Territory.]