

A few weeks ago, upon the suggestion of my friend, William U. Hensel, I accepted an invitation to come to Lancaster and read my historical paper on "The Telegraph in Peace and War," as it contained some historical matter of local interest to Lancastrians. Upon more deliberate consideration, however, I concluded that it would be imposing too much upon your indulgence to read it in its entirety, and that it would be better to cull from it those portions relating to this locality and add material in my possession which would interest you. This I have done, and in doing it been enabled to bear testimony to unrecorded deeds of some Lancaster men, and put in shape for preservation by your society some events in which Lancaster city and county were the fields where they occurred.

A portion of this material I have had in type for limited circulation, but the major part is now presented for the first time and the whole of it put in form to be of interest, if not of value.

The recent destruction of the Columbia bridge prompted my writing a sketch of it, so that there might be a record made of its continuous history, and I will open this paper with that sketch :

"The Columbia Bridge," whether in the singular or collective sense, has encountered as much, if not more, disaster than usually falls to the lot of such structures. Its history, beginning in the first and now running in the declining half of the last decade of the nineteenth century has been marked by financial and physical woes, and yet, as one element after another has tried its destructive

powers upon it, it has nobly turned from its tribulations and offered fresh defiance to its foes.

The success of the Philadelphia and Lancaster turnpike road between those two cities, and that of the Lancaster and Susquehanna, completed in 1803, between Lancaster and Columbia, gave an impetus to turnpike road construction and bridge building, and stimulated the formation of companies to accomplish those results. As Pennsylvania was the centre of the progressive transportation movements of the time, it became also the centre for the promotion of those companies, and gave freely of its means to aid in advancing their projects. Not the least of the projected public improvements was the bridging of the Susquehanna at Columbia. That enterprise found life on the 28th of March, 1809, when Governor Simon Snyder approved an act, entitled " An act authorizing the Governor of Pennsylvania to incorporate a company for the purpose of making and erecting a bridge over the river Susquehanna, in the county of Lancaster, at or near Columbia." In that act Stephen Girard, William Sanson, James Vanuxem, John Perot, Henry Pratt, Thomas McEwen, Martin Dubbs and Thomas S. Lewis of the city of Philadelphia ; John Hurley, Absaham Witmer, Casper Shaffner, Jr., Jacob Strickler, James Wright and Samuel Miller, of the county of Lancaster, and William Barber, John Stewart and Godfrey Lenhart, of the county of York, were appointed commissioners to receive subscriptions to the capital stock, which was placed at \$400,000. This was a great undertaking for those days ; the length of the proposed bridge was unprecedented, the risks were hazardous, and the consequences of these conditions was a hesitancy on the part of the

public to subscribe. Although the limit to be reached in the number of shares at par value of \$100 each before letters patent could issue was only 1,200, it was not until November 19, 1811, that the commissioners could certify that such subscriptions had been made. On that day the Governor issued the letters, and created the corporation under the name and style of "The President, Managers and Company for Erecting a Bridge over the Susquehanna River, in the County of Lancaster, at or near the town of Columbia." In pursuance of that authority, the stockholders met December 11, 1811, and elected William Wright as president ; William P. Beatty treasurer ; John Barber, secretary ; Thomas Boude, Samuel Bethel, James Wright, Samuel Miller, John Evans, Christian Breneman, John Forrey, Jr., Abraham Witmer, Henry Slaymaker, William Barber, Jacob Eichelberger and John Tomilson, managers. One of the provisions of the act authorizing the construction of the bridge was that work upon it should begin in three and be completed within fifteen years. The Legislature, by the act of April 2, 1811, authorized a State subscription of \$90,000 to the stock, half of which was to be paid upon the completion of the abutments and piers and the other half upon the completion of the structure.

At a meeting of the board on December 26, 1811, they provided for soliciting bids for plans and the erection of the bridge. Quite a number of plans and proposals were submitted, out of which those of Henry Slaymaker, Jonathan Wolcott and Samuel Slaymaker were selected, and on July 8, 1812, they were awarded the contract for erecting the bridge on the Burr plan, and in accordance with their bid upon stone

piers forty feet long, ten feet wide at the top, and twenty feet high from low water mark, for the sum of \$150,000. The site selected, and upon which the bridge was erected, was about 1,000 feet farther up the stream than the site of its successors.

The amount of stock subscribed by individuals at the time was but \$150,000, whilst that by the State was provisional. The board and contractors thought they could save money by going on with the abutments, piers and superstructure all at one time, and still obtain the State's subscription. In this they counted without their host. After expending \$78,000, all that was realized from individual subscriptions, and an additional amount nearly equal to that of the State's first installment, they found that the Commonwealth's subscription was unavailable under the provisions of the law, and when they attempted to obtain legislation to alter the terms of payment upon which the subscription was based, there developed an opposition which was strong enough to prevent the alteration. The company's and contractors' funds having all been expended in the incomplete work, and financiers refusing to loan any money upon such kind of security as the unfinished bridge, the board in its dilemma, and to save the enterprise from ruin, on July 5, 1813, determined upon a banking scheme as an aid in constructing the bridge. Out of this transaction came the funds for the completion of the bridge and the payment of the State's subscription of \$90,000.

The title of the company was changed on the 29th of March, 1824, to "The Columbia Bridge Company," and the legislation which authorized the change also authorized the company to carry on a banking business. The *previous* bank-

ing operations of the company had been carried on without legislative consent and brought it into a conflict with the authorities. From the business thus authorized was evolved what is now "The Columbia National Bank." After a quarter of a century of banking and bridging combined, the directors became convinced that the financial standing of the bank was constantly menaced by the hazardous nature of the bridge property, and determined upon disposing of the latter by sale. As early as May 1, 1852, they procured legislative authority to make such disposition of it, but it was not until twelve years thereafter, on the heels of disaster, that the sale was accomplished and the Columbia Bank and the Columbia Bridge Company became two distinct corporations, and their operations confined within the limits of their respective spheres.

The bridge was completed and opened for traffic in 1814. It was 5,690 feet long, between abutments 30 feet wide, 23 feet above the usual level of the water, and composed of 53 arches resting upon stone piers. It was roofed over, and cost \$231,771. The amount of capital stock subscribed was \$419,000 by individuals and \$90,000 by the State. All receipts in excess of cost of bridge were applied to banking purposes.

In February, 1832, a destructive ice freshet occurred in the Susquehanna. A gorge, where huge blocks of ice welded together by friction were piled up thirty or forty feet high, was formed several miles below the bridge, damming the stream, backed the ice and water up over the front street of Columbia and carried the bridge from off its piers. The river, from shore to shore, was filled for days with fields of floating ice, with here and there a span of the bridge eddying through

them. On the 3d and 4th of February five spans of the bridge were taken away, on the 7th nine more, and a few days after thirty additional ones followed, and the destruction became complete. It was replaced in 1834 by a structure which cost \$128,726.50, with its approaches.

The bridge of 1834 was, with its approaches, 5,620 feet long, 40 feet wide, with its bottom chords 15 feet above high water mark. It was a covered bridge, had two tracks and divisions for foot passengers, carriages and other vehicles, and two towing paths, one above the other, for the accommodation of Susquehanna canal traffic through the pool of the dam.

When the wave of civil war struck the shores of the Susquehanna by the march of Early's division, of Ewell's corps, of Lee's army of Northern Virginia, the bridge was ordered by the military authorities of the United States to be destroyed, so as to prevent its being passed over by the enemy. In accordance with that order it was entirely consumed by fire on Sunday, June 28th, 1863, and the naked piers were left to mark the most northerly limit reached by the army of the south, which, receding from that limit, moved southwardly until overpowered and disbanded at Appomattox. The sight of the burning bridge was a sublime one. The fire swept along from span to span until the whole structure was one roaring mass of angry flames; blazing timber hissed as they dropped in the stream and floated towards the dam. The Southern soldiers lined the right bank of the river and swarmed over the adjacent hills, interested spectators of the grand display of fire's awful force. Men, women and children crowded the left bank, almost spell-bound, as the fire shaped fantastic colorings on sky, tree

and water. Then came panic. Columbia had never before seen such a spectacle. "The retreat of the troops, the firing of the bridge, and shell and shot falling into the river created a panic, and the stampede continued during the night, as the shelling of the town was anticipated."

On the 12th of July, 1864, the Columbia Bank sold and conveyed the bridge franchises, piers and other property to Josiah Bacon, Wistar Morris, Thomas A. Scott, Joseph B. Myers, Edward C. Knight, Herman J. Lombaert and Edmund Smith. These gentlemen had, on July 6, 1864, met and organized the Columbia Bridge Company in accordance with law, and elected Herman J. Lombaert as president and Edmund Smith as secretary and treasurer. On the 6th of September, 1864, they conveyed to the bridge company the property, etc., which they had purchased from the bank. In 1868-69 the bridge company built a new railroad and highway bridge upon the piers. The bridge was a "through Howe truss arch." It consisted of 27 spans, was 5,390 feet long, and roofed and weather-boarded. Subsequently two iron spans were placed in the center of the bridge, so that the possible loss by fire should be reduced one-half. Some idea of the size and weight of the structure can be gained from the bill of lumber which went into it. Without going into details, the lumber in board measure consisted of 3,299,952 feet of white pine, 729,906 feet of white oak, 1,900,000 feet of short joint shingles. It was opened for ordinary travel on January 4, 1869, and partially opened for railroad purposes on March 1, 1869. Including the rebuilding and strengthening of many of the piers, and capping them with dressed stone, the cost reached nearly \$400,000. On July 1, 1879, the Columbia

Bridge Company conveyed it to the Pennsylvania Railroad Company.

In the destruction of this bridge it was destined that an element other than those which entered into the destruction of the two preceding bridges was to try its force. Water and fire had had their mad revels, and now the wind was to try one of its most terrific manifestations, having in view the bridge for its most prominent victim. On Saturday, September 26, 1896, a storm was reported as *a* tropic line moving northwest from the Caribbean Sea, it being southeast of Cuba. During the 27th it passed northwestward into the southeastern part of the Gulf of Mexico, and on the 28th moved northward west of Florida. On the morning of the 29th it was over southern Georgia, and by 8 p. m. of the 29th had advanced to southwestern Virginia. The center passed over Washington, D. C., about 11:30 Tuesday night, the lowest barometer reading being 29.30. During the first three days the storm appeared to have very little energy, but on the 29th developed force rapidly as it moved northward. A velocity of 54 miles occurred at Charleston, and 42 at Wilmington. It reached Columbia shortly after 12 o'clock, mid-night of Tuesday, lashing itself into fury before 1 o'clock Wednesday morning, and leaving devastation in its wake. The Columbia Daily *Spy* of September 30th has this description of its force and effect :

"The disaster was wide-spread and general. The force of the winds was irresistible, and the effects more disastrous than any ever known in eastern Pennsylvania. Thousands of people were awakened soon after mid-night by the fury of the storm and the terror of crashing trees and flying debris from roofs and buildings. Houses were swaped to and fro by

the mighty force of the winds. Sleepers were awakened by the crash of window panes or the rocking of their beds, and consuming fear seized many as they contemplated the fury of the storm. To add to the terror of the moment, mill whistles and alarm bells sounded a chorus of distress and summoned the aid of the fire department. This brought hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people to the streets, who wended their way to the scenes of disaster through the debris of the storm, cautious of overhanging roofs, signs and awnings, and fearful of trolley and electric-light wires. Fortunately there was no fire, and the department apparatus was promptly returned to their quarters.

" The hurricane which was promised for to-day came a little after mid-night with a force and fury unknown to the experience and lives of people in this section. The disturbance was gentle at first, but, increasing with every moment, it soon became a hurricane, which swept over the town and country with resistless force, marking its pathway with destruction and ruin. The climax of the storm's power and fury was the destruction of the Columbia bridge, which for so many years had withstood the force of storm and the power of flood. It is a total wreck. It was struck by the full force of the hurricane, swept from the piers, and thrown into the river, a mass of broken and tangled debris. Nothing remains but a short span at the Columbia end of the bridge, the iron span in the center, and the facade at the entrance on the York county side.

"Pen cannot describe the picture of desolation which the bridge presents, and only actual sight will convey to the mind the effect of the fury and force of

the terrible storm. The old bridge was the pride of the town. Now all that is left are the stone piers, with straggling timbers hanging on them. In place of the bridge there is nothing but a stretch of wreckage. We all loved to speak of it as the longest covered bridge in the world, a distinction generally accorded to it, though sometimes disputed by like claims for a similar bridge across the Mississippi river recently completed."

Turning from bridge to wire, Lancaster city has the honor of hearing the first "click" of an electric telegraph instrument on the first telegraph line built for commercial purposes in this country.

After encountering opposition and nearly endless obstacles, Professor Morse, when hope had almost deserted him and poverty stared him in the face, received governmental aid for the construction of an experimental line of telegraph between Baltimore and Washington. Then, as the lamented Blaine so eloquently said :

"The little thread of wire, placed as a timid experiment between the National Capital and a neighboring city grew and lengthened and multiplied with almost the rapidity of the electric current that darted along its iron nerves, until, within his own life-time, continent was bound unto continent, hemisphere answered through ocean's depths unto hemisphere, and an encircled globe flashed forth his eulogy in the unmatched eloquence of a grand achievement."

The first fruit of that experiment's success was a line built between Harrisburg and Lancaster, alongside the tracks of the Harrisburg, Portsmouth, Mount Joy and Lancaster Railroad.

No sooner had the practicability of Morse's invention been proven than the patentees made numerous contracts for the construction of lines throughout the

country, and the most valuable, important and generous of them was given to Henry O'Reilly, of Rochester, N. Y.

Under this contract it became necessary to construct a line between Harrisburg and Lancaster on or before January 1; 1846, to connect at Lancaster with a line to be constructed by the Magnetic Company between Baltimore and New York, on a route via York, Columbia, Lancaster and Philadelphia. The route of this latter line, however, was changed so as to cross the Susquehanna at Port Deposit instead of Columbia, and O'Reilly subsequently connected his Western line with it at Philadelphia. He did not lose any time in performing his part of the contract, but with the aid of Bernard O'Connor, of Lancaster, completed the line to Harrisburg on the 24th of November, 1845. It was a primitive affair. Small, unbarked chesnut poles were planted about one hundred yards apart, so as to make eighteen poles to the mile. Through the top of each pole was inserted a turned black walnut cross-arm, the ends of which were covered with gummed cloth. The conductor was a No. 14 copper wire attached to the poles by giving it a double twist around the gummed cloth ends of the cross-arm. The gummed cloth not proving satisfactory as an insulator, insulation was somewhat improved by replacing it with a cotton cloth dipped in molten beeswax.

There was a good deal of enjoyment among the builders, notwithstanding the difficulties with which they were surrounded. They planted the poles whilst singing this refrain :

" Sink the poles, boys, firm and strong,
Short and close together;
Solder the joints of the mystic thong,
And let it stand forever."

The instruments arrived about January 1, 1846, and were placed in circuit by James D. Reid, who possessed some telegraphic knowledge obtained from his friendship with Professor Morse and by his experience on the experimental line. The relays, enclosed in large walnut boxes, weighed 250 pounds each, and required the strength of two men to lift them onto a table. The reason for this heavy weight grew out of the theory of Professor Morse and Alfred Vail that the wire of the relay should be of the same size as that of the line, and consequently they covered theirs with No. 14 copper wire wound with cotton.

After the instruments had been put in circuit and the battery located at Harrisburg, the operators, David Brooks and Henry C. Hepburn, at Lancaster, and James D. Reid and H. Courtney Hughes, at Harrisburg, settled down to hard work *in* their efforts to open up communication between the two offices. With the exception of Reid, none of the party could read or write the telegraphic alphabet without constant consultation with a copy of it printed in a little book of instructions by Alfred Vail, which they kept open before them.

For a week they pounded and adjusted, adjusted and pounded, without any intelligible signals reaching either office. At last, however, on the 8th of January, 1846, just as despair was on the point of supplanting patient endeavor, whilst practicing writing the alphabet by pressing the finger against the armature of the relay, and Hepburn was drumming on the key, Brooks made the startling discovery that the armature of the relay had, under certain conditions, a motion corresponding to that made on the key. Turning to Hepburn, *he* made known his discovery, and told him to wait a moment

and he would so adjust the armature that writing upon the register could be done by simply manipulating the key. Brooks made the adjustment, when the armature began to work apparently of its own volition and the pen-lever of the register responded. Starting the paper to see what marks or impressions would be made on it, they had the great satisfaction, after comparing the marks with their copy of the alphabet, to read, after a long line of dots, the following words: "Why don't you write, you rascals?" These few words, written by James D. Reid on that Jacksonian anniversary, formed the first intelligible message ever sent upon a line in Pennsylvania, and gave to the line itself the distinction of being the first in operation after the Washington-Baltimore experimental line of Professor Morse.

There was great rejoicing in Harrisburg when it was found that instantaneous communication could be had with Lancaster. People flocked to the offices to see the wonder of the age, but made no material use of the line, the patronage being confined to writing names in telegraphic characters on the paper ribbon with written letters underneath in explanation. Such was the only source of revenue. The revenue, as will be readily perceived, was small, even from that source, for the first day's receipts at Harrisburg were 10 cents and at Lancaster 61/4 cents. In 1852 James D. Reid, speaking of the line, said: "The first day's receipts of the great national office in Washington were one cent, but Harrisburg, brighter than Washington, saw the clear visage of a dime whilst sober-sided Lancaster gloried in the possession of a

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Although the line was not a financial success, it furnished additional proof to

the value of Professor Morse's invention. The relays were difficult of adjustment, and would not remain adjusted for a period of five minutes.

The line itself worked only in clear, cold weather, and then very irregularly. Breaks were of daily occurrence, and so certain were they to happen that Brooks went to the Lancaster office every morning at half past 4 to test for current, and it was the exception when he found it. Finding no current, he would shoulder a bundle of copper wire and start out to find and repair the "break," taking passage on the night line, a train which passed Lancaster at 5 o'clock in the morning on its way from Philadelphia to Harrisburg. This train, climbing over the Conewago hills, made the distance from Lancaster to Harrisburg, thirty-seven miles, in from four and a-half to five hours.

Reid and Hepburn left the line in February, 1846. James M. Lindsay was sent from Baltimore to succeed Reid, and he at Harrisburg and Brooks at Lancaster continued for a few weeks to operate the line. As narrated before, the only revenue accruing to the line was derived from sending the names of the curious over it. The novelty of that patronage wearing off, patrons ceased to materialize, and cash receipts failed to appear. There being no other available revenue, and the line constantly breaking, O'Reilly ordered Lindsay to Philadelphia and Brooks to take down the wire, sell it for old copper, and apply the proceeds to paying the operators' boarding and washing which were in arrears and had been accruing from the time of their arrival. By March 1, 1846, this initial commercial line had passed into history. The money for its construction was furnished by a Rochester, N. Y.,

company, known as " The Atlantic, Lake and Mississippi Valley Telegraph Company."

The line formed the link in the great chain of protected telegraphs, which in less than twenty years from the time of its completion was to bind in indissoluble bonds the Atlantic to the Pacific and in less than thirty years was to unite four of the grand divisions or continents of the world together, bringing all languages to a common center, benefiting commerce, trade, science, art, invention, agriculture and literature, and proving itself an invaluable factor in producing the remarkable and progressive age in which we live and which marks the closing hours of the nineteenth century with ineffaceable distinctness as civilization's most advanced period since the opening of the Christian era,

During the short life of the line it created quite a stir in the sister counties of Dauphin and Lancaster. The copper wire conductor, stretched tightly between poles, gave the wintry blasts the opportunity of producing somewhat musical, weird and fantastic sounds that could be heard for some distance, to the great discomfort of the rustics. The public mind having somewhat of a superstitious bend, many people in the neighborhood of the line, alarmed by the sounds proceeding from the wire as the wind swept over it, would walk a very considerable distance out of their way, often placing themselves at great inconvenience, particularly after sundown, to avoid passing under or near it. Many dismal stories were told of its supernatural powers, and one woman actually fenced in a pole to prevent her cow rubbing against it, fearing that the milk might be spoiled.

Then in rural communities, when any question excited the public interest, the

people would congregate at the "store," or "the Squire's," to gather news and interchange views. I might say that the custom is still in vogue, and has its imitation in the town meetings of their city cousins, who are so fond of pow-wowing over the public weal. Right here let us take a look at the village. The village, a child of convenience, sprung from the pangs of necessity at the call of man's herding inclinations, was mostly an unincorporated community ; ordinarily the center of a township clustered around an inn, a blacksmith shop, a cross-roads store and a meeting house, finding its highest expression of political importance from being the residence of the Township Supervisor and of that august specimen of the minor judiciary, "the Squire." The population made up principally of farmers and farm hands, found days pass less wearily by dwelling closer together than was permissible by the territorial limits of farms. The great events were mostly the arrival of the semi-or tri-weekly mails at the post office, a fresh invoice of goods at the store, and of incipient statesmen, bearing the burdens of State, at the inn. Those events brought the community together at one of the places named to discuss whatever questions the arrivals suggested, or to exchange gossip. Their pleasures were few and simple, the checker board and card table furnishing most of them, whilst occasional quoit-throwing at the blacksmith shop and the spelling bee and the mock-court at the school house varied the monotony of their lives. "Let not ambition mock their useful toil, their homely joys," for it was from just such villages as those that Hampdens rose and Lincolns expanded into greatness, reaching up to originality of thought and expression by having Nature for a tutor and

being so surrounded that their education became something more than the absorption of other men's written ideas, thoughts and opinions.

But all this is changing, and the villages of the long-ago, which were bowers of rustic beauty and the abodes of health and contentment, have passed or are passing away. Their doom had been sounded; the rushing, dashing, flashing spirit of progressiveness which rules this age is the cause. The rustic, but romantic, peaceful edging which the villages gave to the picture of Pennsylvania life is threatened with a change. Already electric lights have deprived them of the softened shadows so comforting to a perturbed spirit on a moonlit night, and the tocsin has sounded announcing the approach of the trolley roads whose entree to those charming localities will forever eliminate their quiet, dreamy, mid-day life. The gas pipe, the water pipe and electric light have invaded the quiet village, the trolley lines in the foreground, and sewers, paved streets, curbed sidewalks, and the woodman's axe in the perspective admonish us that the view is changing, that the dreamy village life will soon be o'er and the village lost in the municipal maelstrom which is engulfing it. But to return to the telegraph and its advent in the village.

One Saturday afternoon, shortly after the line was in operation, a gathering assembled at the "store" in one of the villages, and the all-absorbing topic of conversation was the "telegraph." The "big man" of the vicinity was there. For two terms he had represented his district in the lower house of the Legislature, and he now felt it his duty to express his opinion on the subject, which he did by saying "This telegraph is a great thing. When I had the honor of

representing you in the Legislature I often thought about it, and having turned the subject over in my mind the conclusion reached by me in regard to it is that it will do well enough for carrying letters and small package, but it will never do for carrying large bundles and bale boxes."

David Lechler, a well-kept and humorous man, was the proprietor of "The North American House," where the office in Lancaster was located, and made the telegraph the basis for playing many pranks upon the public. At this day few can credit the curiosity and credulity which characterized the people in connection with the telegraph, and how few had even an idea of the principles governing it. Lechler, discerning the trend of the mind of the people, turned it to advantage in fun-making, and undertook to unfold the mysteries to those who visited his house. It was his great delight on market mornings to gather a crowd of countrymen and women in the barroom, and then explain to them in Pennsylvania Dutch the wonders of the great invention. There was no story that he could invent or apply, or that credulity would accept in connection with the telegraph, that he did not relate. As soon as his harangue had raised the curiosity of his hearers to the highest notch he would hurriedly enter the room where the telegraph office was located and immediately returning, would show a pair of hose, a handkerchief or a newspaper, which he had previously punctured with bores, as specimens of the telegraph's possibilities, at the same time gravely saying : " I received these in just forty seconds from Philadelphia." There were none to doubt Lechler's word or to take into consideration that the line did not extend to Philadelphia, but all, with

open-eyed wonder, tried to account for the articles passing over and around the cross-arms. They were satisfied, however, with Lechler's explanation, that that process was the inventor's secret which he dared not divulge.

Whilst the line was taken down and sold the instruments were allowed to remain. Those at Lancaster were used in a telegraphic school, whereto intended telegraph operators from different parts of the country were sent to be taught the mysteries. The teacher was William Johnson, then, as now, a respected resident of Lancaster. Many men, who afterwards became prominent in the telegraphic profession, went out in the telegraphic world with Billy's diploma. Among the number was Anson Stager, who became the manager of Western Union interests that insured the great success that company has scored. Mr. Stager during the war was appointed a quartermaster and detailed to the Military Telegraph Department, in which he rose to be a brigadier-general. The United States Military Telegraph Corps received its first recruits from Pennsylvania and its first line builder was a Lancaster man.

On April 17, 1861, I went with Thomas A. Scott to Governor Curtin's office, at Harrisburg, and there, with a relay magnet and a key placed on a window sill, opened the first military telegraph office on this continent. In the same office, on the 25th of April, 1861, on the call of Mr. Scott, there reported for orders David Strouse, from Mifflin ; D. Homer Bates, from Altoona ; Richard O'Brien, from Greensburg, and Samuel Brown, from from Pittsburg, four of the best operators on the Pennsylvania Railroad Company's telegraph line.

But of the nucleus formed by the little

band of Pennsylvania railroad telegraph operators grew a wondrous military telegraph corps, *in* which were enrolled during the war twelve hundred young men, telegraph operators, whose ages ranged from sixteen to twenty-two years—boys in years and stature, but giants in loyalty and in the amount of work they performed for their country. They did not plan campaigns nor fight battles, but amid the roar of conflict were found coolly advising the commanding general of the battle's progress. They formed the corps that was the very nerves of the army during the war, and so considered by all those who came in contact with it, and yet it was not, and has not been, recognized as an integral part of that army.

Their position in the army was a peculiar one, whether as enlisted men or volunteers, and there were both classes in the service ; they were not subject to the *orders* of its active officers, but came under the immediate direction of President Lincoln, as commander-in-chief, through the Secretary of War. They were in effect field couriers, with enlarged responsibilities. The secrets of the Nation were entrusted to them, and the countersign of the army was often in their possession a week or more in advance of its promulgation. All the movements of the army, all the confidences of the commanders were entrusted to them, and yet not one was ever known to betray that knowledge and confidence in the most remote degree.

A hundred nameless graves throughout the battle-fields of the Union attest their devotion unto death to the sublime cause in which they were engaged, and yet the government they loved and labored for never as much as thanked them for their services !

Every nation, ours among the number, has now a military telegraph corps as an integral part of its army, and yet, before the Civil War in the United States, such an arm of the service was practically unknown. It was reserved for mere boys—American boys—to inaugurate that arm of the service, demonstrate its value in actual war, and for so doing, become the recipients of the monumental ingratitude of the nineteenth century!

As the war progressed the corps developed and equipment for field work was perfected.

Whilst Line Builders Paul D. Connor, Charley Noyes and Dave Carnathan were the first to extend the military telegraph lines from Washington into Virginia, it was reserved for Parker Spring, of Lancaster, Pa., to head the first telegraph construction corps for the United States Army. Before Captain R. F. Morley, of the 17th Infantry, and formerly superintendent of the Allegheny Valley Railroad, was specially detailed in September, 1861, as general manager of government railroads and telegraphs, men for construction work were picked up as needed wherever they were to be found. Captain Morley in perfecting the organization selected Parker Spring, an experienced operator and builder, to take charge of the telegraph construction corps. The initial party of the corps was composed of twenty-two men, divided into gangs of "climbers," "pole-cutters," "diggers," and "laborers," with intelligent foremen over each gang. Spring picked his men for being steadfast, reliable and hard workers. They were drilled daily and kept under military discipline. The party was provided with tents, horses, wagons, and a full complement of implements for their work. The work was laborious; at all

hours of the day or night they were liable to be and were frequently called upon to meet some exigency of the service. But no matter if they were called from sleep when midnight had thrown its dark shroud around earthly scenes, or in the dawn of the morning, their answer to the summons was made with alacrity and good cheer. In constructing new, tearing down and rebuilding old lines, they were at times compelled to plod through snow and mud, in rain, over hills, across rivers, and to pick their way cautiously through forests and swamps. Frequently the work would go in tracts of country from whence civilization had apparently departed, and *where* the only sounds to be heard were the notes of their own industry. At other times their work would carry them so close to the enemy's lines that with only a rivulet between they could hold converse with the Rebel pickets. It was a varied and picturesque life, as well as one of excitement and danger. Spring and his men were entitled to great credit for their fidelity and trustworthiness in rapidly extending the telegraph lines to meet the needs of the government in the direction of more speedy means of communication.

I cannot allow this opportunity to pass without making record of heroic service in the *face* of the enemy of two other men from Lancaster—William Johnson, already mentioned, and Strickland Everts. In the campaign of 1863, when the Southron invaded Pennsylvania, marching almost unimpeded down the Cumberland Valley, these men kept the telegraph lines up and in operation, and were driven step by step down the valley, and as the enemy withdrew returned in their immediate wake and made repairs before the clatter of the swords of the cavalry had died away. On the first of July I saw

these two men driven into Carlisle by the advance of General J. E. B. Stuart, and standing on the main street, in front of Dr. Stevenson's house, which was struck by a shell, taking the bombardment as coolly as seasoned campaigners. One of them picked up a fragment of the shell and afterwards sent it to Dr. Stevenson, who cemented it in the breach in his wall, where it remains to-day.

The city and county are connected with many interesting railroad and canal events, some of which I have recited in my historical sketches of the Philadelphia and Columbia and Harrisburg and Lancaster railroads, but here, and in conclusion, there is one I desire to incorporate in this paper

Early in this century the restless spirit of American progress and adventure, not quieted by extending through the Louisiana purchase the boundaries of the United States across the Mississippi, cast its eyes beyond the Sabine and toward territorial expansion in the land of the Aztec, with its wealth of precious stones and metals. Imperial expansion with imperial power and luxury was an ever-present dream with the highly cultivated people, scions of aristocratic stocks. In the Southern States of the Union, and it is not surprising that the emigration to that part of Mexico now known as Texas was largely made up of educated emigrants from that section, nor that those emigrants should at an early day throw off their allegiance to the unstable government of Mexico and establish a government of their own. Without sufficient strength to establish a strong centralized government on an aristocratic basis, there was nothing left the people of Texas after the independences of that Republic was acknowledged and estab-

lished but to favor annexation to the United States. Annexation was consummated on the 29th of December, 1845. General Taylor, in command of a small American army, left New Orleans in July, 1845, to occupy Texas. On the 8th of March, 1846, he crossed the Neuces and marched toward the Rio Grande, occupying the disputed territory between those rivers. That occupation brought on the Mexican War. Whilst General Taylor was waiting for the orders from Washington to begin his march reinforcements were being pressed forward to him. In the winter of 1845 and 1846 part of these reinforcements passed westward from Philadelphia via the Philadelphia and Columbia railroad. They reached Dillerville in comparatively good time. As the trains left Dillerville, drawn by the "David R. Porter" and "Henry Clay," two eleven-ton engines, to pass over the Harrisburg and Lancaster railroad for the former town a snow storm came up and soon the rails were covered with snow an inch or two in depth and sufficient to stall the trains. That was an unexpected and consequently not-provided-for dilemma. 'Tis true that the hickory brooms placed in front of the truck of the locomotive for the purpose of removing obstacles from the rails were in position, but they only tended to pack the snow harder. At this point American ingenuity and American pluck came to the front and improvised a snow plow to throw the snow from the track as the engine proceeded. This improvised plow consisted of plain boards held in hand by two men sitting on the bumper. The boards were used to push the snow to one side, and were raised and lowered whenever they came in contact with "broken" joints.

Practically, it was shoving the snow off the track. John Keller was one of the two men so engaged, and in the fourteen hours that it took these trains to reach Harrisburg from Dillerville he stuck to his post, displaying those powers of endurance and loyalty to duty that have characterized his career and made it successful.

WILLIAM BENDER WILSON,

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