

John P. Downs, editor in charge; Fenwick Y. Hedley, editor in chief;
History of Chautauqua County New York and its People Vol. II. (

American
Historical
Society

1921

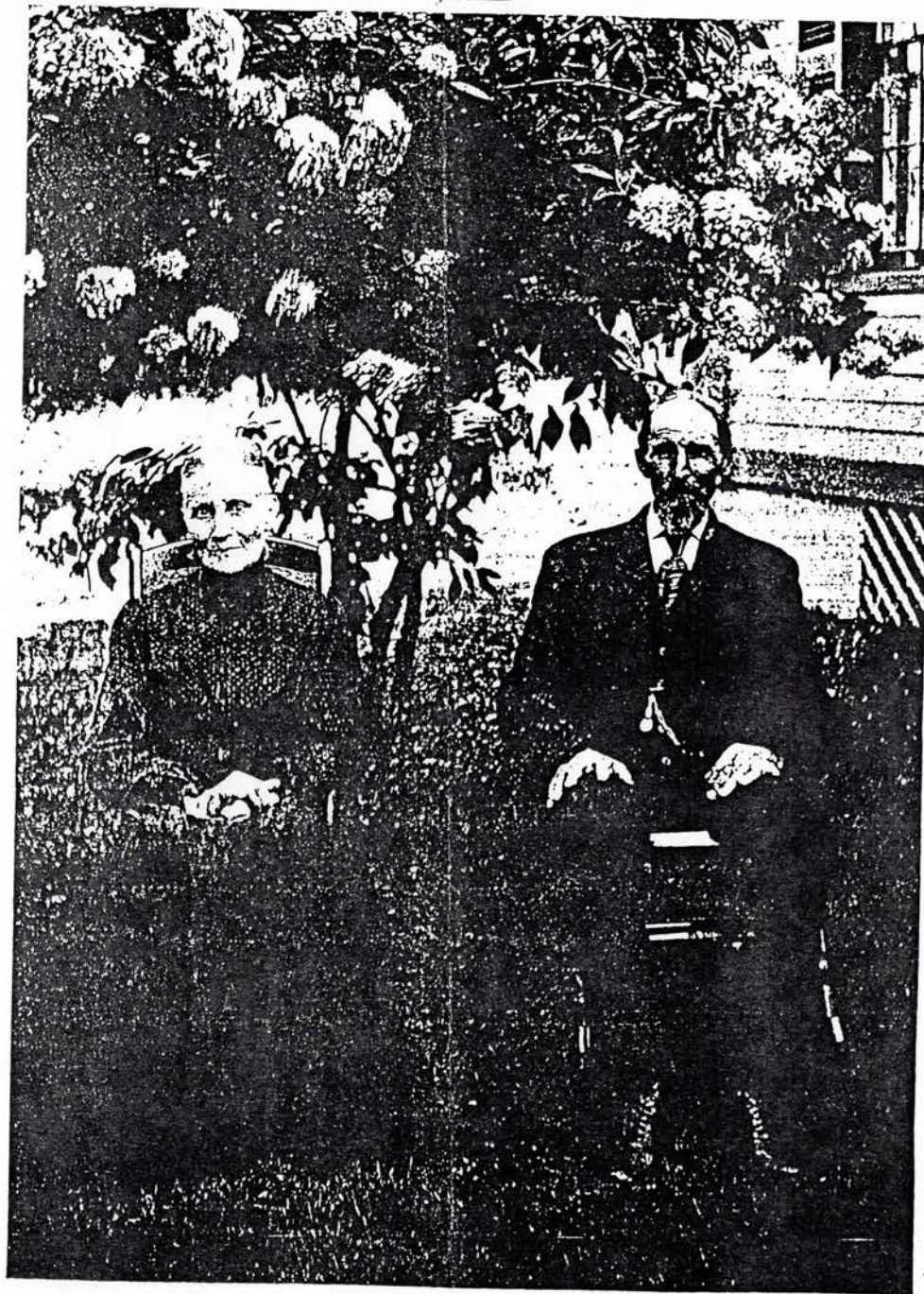
pp.

176-

178.

JOHN M. IRVIN, one of the leading residents of Sinclairville, Chautauqua county, N. Y., is one of the worthy men of Chautauqua county. Of honorable Civil War service, he has since been a useful citizen, a producer, independent and responsible, and a public worker of definite achievements. He was a successful farmer for twenty-five years, after which he retired from such laborious work and became a merchant, and his record of public service include eight years as coroner of Chautauqua county, eight years as deputy sheriff of the county, fifteen years as superintendent of Evergreen Cemetery, Sinclairville, and served as village president, highway commissioner and tax collector. In all, his life has been full of noteworthy activities, and his place in the current history of Chautauqua county has been definitely earned; indeed, that place would have been earned by his national service in the time of the country's greatest need, during the Civil War, and it has also been earned by his long and active public life.

John M. Irvin was born in Warrensville, Pa., July 18, 1842, the son of John and Mary (Johnson) Irvin. He is of Irish descent, his father, John Irvin, having been born in County Donegal, Ireland, where he grew to manhood and married Mary Johnson. They were the parents of five children at the time John Irvin brought his family to America. The passage was made in either 1840 or 1841, and under conditions such as would in these days of comfortable traveling be considered impossible; they crossed in a sailing vessel, and the passage took six weeks. The chief danger to them was not the sea, but the undermining of health in such congested quarters. Often in those days a passenger ship arriving at American ports would report the death during the voyage of forty or fifty percent. of the passengers, from smallpox, or what was termed ship fever, but what is now known to have been typhus, caused by unsanitary conditions. One of the five children of John and Mary (Johnson) Irvin died at Lockport, N. Y., while on their way to Warren county, Pa., and the parents were fortunate probably in getting to their journey's end with four of their five children, as conditions of sea travel were in those days it was only the courageous or venturesome, or those in desperate need, who would cross the ocean. However, John and Mary (Johnson) Irvin, with four of their five children, landed safely upon the American shore eventually, and soon John Irvin had settled his family in a comfortable home in Warrensville, Pa., and was making the means of existence from his labor as a brickmaker, in a brickyard of that place. It was Warrensville, a year or so after the family reached America, that John M.,



MR. AND MRS. JOHN M. IRVIN

settled his family in the township of Kiantone, and there found employment with James Prendergast, farmer. The return from his labor was probably not more than fifty cents per day, but the cost of living was proportionately low, and the family prospered, by thrift and hard work. Mrs. Irvin made some extra money by also boarding the other farm hands of Farmer Prendergast. Under those conditions, the Irvin family steadily accumulated a little means, sufficient to enable John Irvin after five years to purchase a tract of one hundred and twenty acres of land in Charlotte township, and to pay a satisfactory sum in cash toward such purchase. Upon that farm John Irvin lived with his family until his death, all the time steadily improving the property, and making his family more comfortable. His death came in 1864, and he was buried in Evergreen Cemetery, Sinclairville. He was a man of strong character and honorable life. In political allegiance, he was a Whig, and when the Republican party was constituted became a staunch supporter of it. His widow survived him for twenty years, her death not coming until 1884, when she passed away in the home of her son, James, in Sinclairville, Chautauqua county, N. Y. She was buried beside her husband in Evergreen Cemetery. They were of the same faith, both ardent Protestants, and in America members of the Episcopal church. They were the parents of seven children: 1. Samuel, who died in Sinclairville, Chautauqua county, N. Y. 2. James, who died in the State of Wyoming. 3. Thomas, who died in Pennsylvania. 4. John, who died in infancy, and was buried at Lockport, N. Y., in 1841. 5. William, who died in Tidicut, Pa.; his daughter became the wife of Dr. Charles S. Cheland, of Sinclairville. 6. John M., who is the only surviving member of his generation of the Irvin family, and to record whose life, in its connection with Chautauqua county, is the main purpose of this article. 7. Johnston, who became identified with oil operations in Pennsylvania, and died in Clarendon, that State.

John M. Irvin, son of John and Mary (Johnson) Irvin, was about eight years old when the family came to live in Charlotte township, upon the farm his father had acquired, and until his years of school study closed he attended the Union No. 6 District School, working many minor farming tasks meanwhile. After leaving school, he earnestly began work, finding plenty with which to occupy his time on the extensive, and to some extent undeveloped, acreage his father owned. He assisted his father and elder brothers in the operation of the farm until he was twenty years old, and then could not be held back from offering his strong arm to his country, in its national stress of Civil War. On Aug. 28, 1862, John M. Irvin enlisted in Company 154th New York Regiment, his immediate commander being Capt. Donneley, and the regimental commander being Col. P. H. Jones. With that unit he served until almost the war's end, when he was transferred to the Second Battalion, Veterans' Relief Corps, under Capt. Myers. Eventually, on June 30, 1865, he was mustered out, with an honorable certificate, at Nashville, Tenn. His military record and war service were meritorious; he was present at the battle of Chancellorsville, 1863, which was disastrous in many ways to both Union and Confederate forces, the Union

Army of the Potomac losing, in killed and wounded, 17,000 men, and the Confederate forces losing almost as many, and also Gen. "Stonewall" Jackson, who was fired on while reconnoitering by his own men, who mistook his escort for a Union company; young Irvin took part in Rockyface Ridge, where he suffered dislocation of the knee, and fracture of three ribs, wounds which kept him in hospital at Nashville, Tenn., for several weeks; for meritorious service he was promoted to the grade of sergeant, while in Virginia, in 1863. He participated in the battle of Lookout Mountain, and in the decisive battle of Gettysburg, which seemed to be the turning point of the war, in favor of the Union. He served until midsummer of 1865, then was honorably discharged. He returned to his home, and took up the work of farming the homestead tract of 120 acres in Charlotte township, his father having died a year earlier, while he was in the military service. From 1865 until 1889, John M. Irvin held steadily and successfully to farming, and during that time greatly improved the property, building house, barn, and other buildings, and making the farm a rich one for dairying purposes. During the twenty-four years of his operation of the farm, he proved himself to be a skillful farmer, as well as a good man of business. In 1889 he retired from farming, and left the farm management in the hands of his son. Going to Sinclairville, and being of too energetic a nature to retire altogether from business, he established himself as a merchant, handling shingles and other builders' supplies, and also artificial fertilizers. For sixteen years he held to that business, but in 1905 retired altogether from trading, but he still held to his public work.

He has proved himself to be a man of commendable public spirit. He has always been well regarded in Charlotte township, because his general mode of living was such as to bring him friends; his unselfish interest in his fellow-citizens brought him very true friends; and his steadfastness and general stability, both material and moral, brought him general respect from the people of the district, so that when he expressed himself willing to accept public office, he was duly placed there. He was coroner of Chautauqua county for eight years, and deputy sheriff of the county for a like term. For one term, he was president of the village of Sinclairville, and during that term was the principal mover in the project which resulted in the securing for the village of the splendid water supply Sinclairville now enjoys. He has served terms as highway commissioner, and tax collector of the township, and one of his most thorough and unselfish public services has been his labors during fifteen years, as superintendent of Evergreen Cemetery, Sinclairville, where both his parents were buried. By careful attention, he made the cemetery one of the most beautiful in the county, his work manifesting the reverence in which he held the memory of his father and mother, and of many departed friends, whose earthly remains were interred in that sacred spot. Politically, Mr. Irvin has been a Republican in general principle, and has given the party good service in the area in which he had influence. And he has shown himself to have been a devoted husband and father.

Mr. Irvin married, in Charlotte township, Nancy, daughter of John and Margaret (Harper) Allen. Their wedded life has been a long and happy one; they are the parents of three children: 1. Hattie May, who married A. L. Staples, of Jamestown, N. Y., where they now reside. 2. Arthur C., who lives at Silver Creek, Chautauqua county, N. Y. 3. Ernest C., who took up financial affairs, and now is cashier of the State Bank at Sinclairville, N. Y.

Altogether, the life of John M. Irvin has been a full and meritorious one; his war service would in any event have brought him honor, but it is gratifying to realize that his civilian activities have also been worthy of his army record. In an important section of Chautauqua county, he has been a factor for many decades, and he rightfully deserves a place in this historical record.