

HISTORY <sup>4-726</sup>  
OF  
BALTIMORE CITY  
AND  
COUNTY

FROM THE EARLIEST PERIOD TO THE PRESENT DAY:

INCLUDING

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

OF THEIR

REPRESENTATIVE MEN.

BY

J. THOMAS SCHARF, A.M.,

AUTHOR OF "CHRONICLES OF BALTIMORE;" "HISTORY OF MARYLAND;" MEMBER OF THE MARYLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND ACADEMY OF SCIENCES; MEMBER OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA; HONORARY MEMBER OF THE GEORGIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY; CORRESPONDING MEMBER OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETIES OF NEW YORK, WISCONSIN, MINNESOTA, SOUTH CAROLINA AND VIRGINIA; OF THE HISTORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY OF OHIO; OF THE NEW ENGLAND HISTORIC-GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY, ETC., ETC.

---

I L L U S T R A T E D.

---

PHILADELPHIA:  
LOUIS H. EVERTS.

1881.

mends the work in the highest terms; and it has been rewarded by the approbation of Marshall, Kent, DeWitt Clinton, and other competent judges in Europe and America. Mr. Hoffman also published in 1836 one volume of his "Legal Outlines;" "Miscellaneous Thoughts on Men, Manners, and Things," in 1837; "Viator; or, A Peep into my Note-Book," in 1841; "Legal Hints," in 1846; "Chronicles," two volumes, in 1855, which was to have been extended to six volumes. "If we were called upon," says the *North American Review*, xlv., 482, "to designate any single work which had exercised a greater influence over the profession of the law in this country than all others, which had most stimulated the student in his studies, most facilitated his labors, and, in fine, most contributed to elevate the standard of professional learning and morals, we should unhesitatingly select Hoffman's 'Course of Legal Study.'" George S. Hillard said, "The constant reply of Lagrange to the young men who consulted him respecting their mathematical studies was, 'Study Euler;' and, in like manner, we should say to every law student from Maine to Louisiana, 'Study Hoffman.'" In the words of another admirer of this excellent and useful writer, "What Cujacius said of Paul de Castro has been appropriately applied to Prof. Hoffman's 'Course of Legal Study,'—*Qui non habet Paulum de Castro, tuni-cam vendat, et emat.*"

Two other lawyers of a literary turn must be named here, Messrs. John H. B. Latrobe and Isaac Nevett Steele. The latter was, if we mistake not, a contributor to *Blackwood's Magazine* about 1820–25, and if his profession had not captured him and his clients bound him down to it, some charming and important work must have come from his bright and sparkling pen. Mr. Steele is a native of Cambridge, Dorchester Co., where he was born on the 25th of April, 1809. He was the son of James Steele, who was a prominent citizen of Dorchester, and was the ninth of a family of ten children. In 1819 his father removed to Annapolis, where Mrs. Steele (*née* Miss Mary Nevett) had been educated, and where his death occurred not long afterwards. His demise, however, did not interfere with the education of his son, which had been commenced at Cambridge under Rev. Nathaniel Wheaton, his private tutor, and was afterwards continued at St. John's College, Annapolis, and at Trinity College, Hartford, Conn. Mr. Steele began his law studies at the age of eighteen, in the office of Alexander C. Magruder, of Annapolis, completing them under the direction of David Hoffman, of Baltimore, and coming to the bar in 1830. His earlier professional experience was not unlike that of the great majority of legal aspirants,—a weary, waiting time, gradually dawning into hope and success. Happily he was not a man to waste this seed-time, and when the opportunity that comes to every man was at length presented it found him full armed and ready to meet on equal terms the best legal talent of

his day. In 1839 he had so far distinguished himself as to attract the attention of the then attorney-general, Josiah Bayley, who appointed him his deputy for Baltimore County Court, an appointment continued by Mr. Bayley's successor, the late George R. Richardson, and retained by Mr. Steele until he resigned it in 1849.

His health, which had never been robust, and which had prevented his graduation at Trinity College, again failed him in 1845, and he was forced to seek in foreign travel rest and recreation from the labors of his office and the general practice that had by this time engaged him. Accordingly he visited Europe, and remained abroad eighteen months, traveling in England and on the continent. On his return to Maryland he at once resumed the practice of the law in Baltimore, and in 1849 married Rosa L., daughter of the late Hon. John Nelson, of the Baltimore and Frederick bar. Still impeded in his professional career by the feebleness of a physical constitution which was unequal to the demands made upon it by a vigorous intellect, he accepted in 1849 the position of *charge d'affaires* to Venezuela, in the hope—fully realized by the result—that the mild and equable climate of that latitude would enable him at last to persevere without interruption in the labors of professional life. At Caraccas Mr. Steele remained for four years, narrowly escaping death in a struggle with robbers, who broke into the house occupied by the legation, in the expectation of finding in the dwelling of the *charge d'affaires* the specie which it was customary for persons to deposit for safe keeping with the diplomatic representatives of their respective nationalities. While in Venezuela Mr. Steele gained considerable credit for having secured the settlement of heavy claims on the part of citizens of the United States, which had been so long postponed as to be regarded as almost hopeless.

Mr. Steele's health having been restored by his sojourn in Venezuela, he returned to the United States in 1853, at once resuming his practice, and devoting himself to it without interruption from that time until the present. Although his connection with politics has been merely of a passing character, he was at one period chairman of the Whig State Central Committee, and has always been found ready to throw the weight of his influence and intellect in support of the principles which he has believed best for the welfare and prosperity of the country, permitting, even as late as 1880, the use of his name as one of the Democratic Presidential electors of Maryland. No other pursuit, however, no matter how tempting or attractive, was suffered to divert his mind and energies from the profession to which he had devoted himself, and it is to this fixedness of purpose and patient determination that much of his success is due. The first occasion which drew public attention strongly to him was the trial of Adam Horn in 1843,

in which Mr. Steele alone represented the State, conducting the prosecution against the counsel for the defense, two of them of the highest standing in the profession, and securing the conviction of the accused after a seven days' trial, in which he displayed the most conspicuous ability. In the present limits it is impossible to enumerate even the most important of the many noted cases in which Mr. Steele has been engaged during his long professional career. There have been few cases before the Maryland courts within the last twenty-five years involving great principles or large interests in which Mr. Steele has not been prominent as counsel, and, with one or two exceptions, his name will be found more frequently in the pages of the Maryland reports than any other lawyer of his time. After all, though the judges on the bench pronounce the decisions, it is sometimes the lawyer on the floor below who moulds the judicial mind, and it is neither exaggeration nor extravagant praise to say that much of that part of the law of the State which is to be found in reported cases and judicial decisions bears the impress of Mr. Steele's clear, comprehensive, and powerful intellect. In his mental constitution logic and reason claim the foremost places. Rhetoric and forensic display are discarded unless they spring naturally and spontaneously from the subject. If there be a weak point in his adversary's armor, no matter how ingenious the concealment or cunning his fence, it is instantly discovered, and as instantly made the object of successful and irresistible attack. In his statement of a case "he is remarkable for his clearness, and in his argument of it for his forcible conciseness. At the trial table he is cautious and wary, leaving nothing to chance, and taking nothing for granted, and when he is done there is little left for any one else to do." There is no doubt as to the verdict which posterity will pass upon his professional rank and career, as there is none with regard to the judgment of the present generation. He stands easily among the first lawyers of the day, and in the future will be classed with the brilliant galaxy of legal talent that has adorned the history of the Maryland bar.

Mr. Steele is a member of the Episcopal Church. At the annual commencement on the 31st of July, 1872, the degree of Doctor of Laws was conferred on him by St. John's College, Annapolis.

John H. B. Latrobe, born May 4, 1803, seems to be incapable of either wearing out or rusting out. He has been one of the busiest men in Baltimore for over fifty years,—artist, engineer, railroad lawyer, patent lawyer, business lawyer, philanthropist, historian, poet. At what point has he not touched society in Baltimore, and where has his touch fallen without being felt for the good and benefit of all? No man in the United States has a larger store of varied information than Mr. Latrobe, and in the way of ana, reminiscences and observation, such as a man of the world picks up in the course of long inculcation in society of the best sort,

Mr. Latrobe's memory is an unequalled treasure-house.

To this period also belongs George M. Gill, who still gives the community the benefit of his sage counsel and his local knowledge. Mr. Gill was born in Baltimore in 1803; educated at St. Mary's College, and brought to the bar when only twenty years old. For fifty-eight years he has been in steady practice, having much fiduciary business and many public trusts in his care. He is not a politician, yet no one speaks more boldly or more frequently to the public on occasions when the general interests demand it. Early in life he was a member of the City Council, also city counselor, and he represented Baltimore in the Constitutional Convention of 1867, where he was eminently successful in securing the adoption of safeguards to protect the city from debt and loose, illicit expenditures.

The last of the lawyers whom we shall attempt to mention in connection with this period as fertile in legal ability of the first order will be William Schley and Hugh Davy Evans. The latter, the best, most amiable, most unsophisticated of men, was also the most erudite of lawyers in obstrusities and the by-paths, the musty precedents and abandoned practices of his profession. But he was a man "born out of his due time," or, rather, living in the wrong sphere. As an English proctor, a judge of a court of arches, or the counsel of an Episcopal government, with his books in the dim religious shade of a cathedral close, Mr. Evans would have been a great success. His services were invaluable in consultation. His books are accurate and condensed embodiments of the legal status of their subjects, his briefs were models in their way, but he had no sort of success at the bar that was at all proportionate to his talents and industry. Mr. Schley, on the other hand, was one of the most competent and successful barristers and pleaders that the Baltimore bar has produced. He knew the law well, both the common law, the statutes, and the rulings; he was an excellent judge of human nature, full of sound practical common sense, and no man could be plainer or more logical than he in statement and argument. In many respects he resembled Luther Martin, and he had the faculty in a remarkable degree, both before judge and before jury, of following up, pursuing, and hunting down with pertinacity and the unerring instinct of a sleuth-hound the point of all others which was the material, vital, and hinge-point of the case upon which he was engaged.

In 1851 the issue raised by the "glorious nineteen" was finally settled. Governor Philip Francis Thomas, in his message to the General Assembly when it met in January, 1850, speaking of the long-deferred question of constitutional reform, very plainly told them that "unless the wishes of the people in this behalf are gratified, the sanction of the Legislature will not much longer be invoked." A "Reform Bill" calling a constitutional convention was accordingly adopted;