

## Biographical Sketch of Samuel Henry Reynolds (1831-1889) and Selected Family Members

[SAMUEL HENRY REYNOLDS](#) was born at Briar Creek, Columbia County, PA., Nov. 20, 1831 (or 1832<sup>1</sup>), a son of Thomas Reynolds. Although Samuel was very well known in the area at the time and there is a wealth of information about him, very little information has been discovered regarding his father **Thomas**.

At 14 years of age Samuel entered [Dickinson College](#). He graduated from there with honors in 1850 at only 18 years old. He then went to Bellefonte in central Pennsylvania and began to read law with Hon. J. T. Hale and was admitted to practice law in 1853. In September 1855, he was admitted to the Bar at Lancaster, PA. - at only 23. He resided in Lancaster from then on.

A year later in 1856 he was elected City Solicitor, a position which he held until his private law practice became so large that he was compelled to decline a re-election.

In 1858 he married [Mary Jenkins Fordney](#), a daughter of [Colonel William Bush Fordney, Esq.](#), a prominent lawyer and District Attorney from 1839-1845.

In 1866 he was the Democratic nominee for United States Congress for the 9th District of Pennsylvania but was [defeated](#) by [Thaddeus Stevens](#).

He took an active interest in the James Buchanan campaign for president and after Buchanan was elected, was offered the position of "Private Secretary to the President". He declined that office. Later, President Buchanan said that "he acted wisely".

He remained closely connected and upon Buchanan's death in 1868, read the funeral service at the burial of President Buchanan.

In May 1872, he was appointed as a member of the Pennsylvania State Constitutional Convention and in 1878 elected a delegate-at-large. He was time and again a delegate to the State and National Democratic Conventions. He served as a school director for nine years and was for many years an officer of St. James Episcopal Church. He was prominent in the Masonic Order, which he joined in 1850 and eventually became the Master of Lodge 43.

On one occasion his name, unknown to him, was presented to the Democratic State Convention as a candidate for the position of Judge of the State Supreme Court, for which he received a very flattering complimentary vote; but not being influenced by judicial aspirations, he refused thereafter to have his name used in that connection.

For over thirty years Samuel was one of the leading members of the Lancaster, Pennsylvania bar.

In his later years, after retiring from the bar, became the president of the Peoples National Bank.

Worthy of mention are Samuel's son ([William Frederick](#), the author's great-grandfather) and brother (also [William Frederick](#)) who were very prominent in central Pennsylvania. The latter is reported to have been "the first millionaire in central Pennsylvania" (quite a feat for the mid 19th century). Several items of note are his donation of thousands of acres of his land to the state of Pennsylvania (now a state park), selling "[The Big Spring](#)" to the town of Bellefonte (was and still is a major source of water for the entire town) for \$1, and building and residing in the "grand Manor on Linn St." in Bellefonte - now the "[Reynolds Mansion Bed & Breakfast](#)" ([reynoldsmansion.com](http://reynoldsmansion.com)).

So much information is known about Samuel (and his brother and son - only a small portion of which is included here), much from a very prominent and public life. Several of his close relatives are equally as well known. There is even a close connection by marriage to the then Governor Andrew Curtin, governor of Pennsylvania during the Civil War.

Samuel died in the early hours of Sept. 10, 1889. His death warranted a full column and a half on the [front page of The Lancaster Intelligencer later that very same day](#).

Even with the prominence and all this information regarding Samuel, very little is known about Samuel's father Thomas and mother Mary. The few tidbits regarding Thomas include that he *"was a leading merchant and highly esteemed in private and business circles. [Samuel's] mother (Mary) was a daughter of William Roger, a well-known farmer of Northampton county, of more than ordinary attainments in literary culture."*

Thomas, you remain such a mystery.

~James Reynolds ("Jim")  
Samuel's Great-Great-Grandson  
[jimreynolds@gmail.com](mailto:jimreynolds@gmail.com)

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Samuel himself did not know his year of birth, noting his age on his passport application as "49 or 50 years" and in the margin: *"\*I am not certain as to year of birth. One record has it 1831 and another 1832"*