

MAHANoy CITY CHRONICLES/Researched by Lorraine Stanton

People of the early community

By BILL O'BRIEN
Herald writer

MICHAEL T. O'CONNOR was one of Mahanoy City's best known residents during the late 1300s. His years of employment at the Philadelphia and Reading depot made him known to hundreds of people who came and went via the railroad.

He was the son of Irish immigrants who put down their roots in Schuylkill County long before any thought was given to a town named Mahanoy City. His father, Michael O'Connor, left his native County Kilkenny at the age of 16 in 1830 and found his way to Pottsville. Later he moved a few miles north of Minersville to a place called Irish Valley which was rapidly becoming a Little Ireland for immigrants who fled the potato famine and cruel British rule in their native land. The Payne Brothers, pioneer coal operators in Irish Valley, had the welcome mat out for immigrants, offering work at the collieries and company houses in what was then known as Payne's Patch, today's Heckscherville.

In Irish Valley, Michael O'Connor met and married Mary Brennan. The Brennan clan was so prolific in that area that fable has it that General Robert E. Lee is said to have commented that if he'd had the Brennans of Cass Township in his Confederate Army, he'd never have lost the war.

AFTER THE FORMATION of Cass Township in 1848, Michael O'Connor became active in township politics and was elected to the school board. He and Mary raised a family of seven boys and two girls.

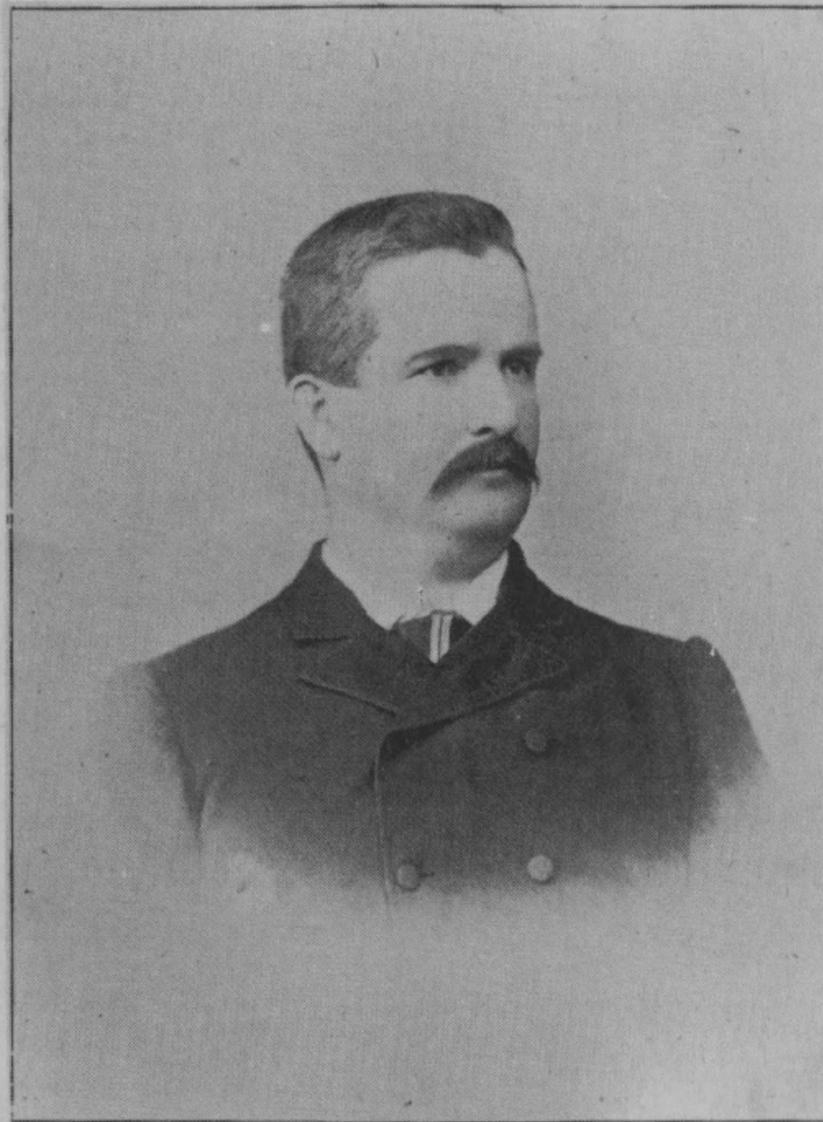
The oldest boy was Michael, is the subject of today's chronicle. He was born in Irish Valley on Jan. 26, 1857, and was 15 years old when he made his way over the Broad Mountain to Mahanoy City in 1872.

He was attracted by the lure of the railroad and began learning telegraphy by posting with veteran operators. After becoming proficient in the telegraphic code and the rules governing the railroad traffic movement, he was hired to fill the operator's position at the Boston Run station.

During his eight months at Boston Run he impressed his superiors enough to earn a promotion to the choice position of telegraph operator at the busy Mahanoy City station.

HIS PERFORMANCE continued to earn him promotions. He went up through the ranks from operator to ticket clerk, yardmaster, train dispatcher and, finally, in 1889, he was named general ticket agent and freight agent in Mahanoy City. He also served as agent for the United States Express Company.

A measure of his stature in the community was seen in his election to serve on the board of the Serial Saving Fund, one of



Michael T. O'Connor
Railroad ticket agent

the major thrift organizations during the borough's early years.

He also became prominent in county politics and served as one of the delegates to the 1892

national Democratic convention in Chicago where Grover Cleveland was nominated for the presidency.

The O'Connor residence was at 94 S. Main St., where he resided with his wife, Lizzie Haughney, and their son, James.

EBENEZER MORRIS made his mark on Mahanoy City's historical ledger by being an ordinary hardworking miner who contributed more than the ordinary citizen's share toward the town's civic welfare.

He was a citizen who was always available when the community asked him to serve. You'll find the name of Ebenezer Morris in the school district archives as a member of the school board. You'll find him in the borough records as having held the office of borough supervisor. You'll find him in the election records as having been elected a justice of the peace, although he never took the oath to serve in that office.

A native of Wales, where he was born June 10, 1832, he came to the United States in 1854 and located in Saint Clair. He was married there in 1856 to Mary Edwards, also a native of Wales, who came to Schuylkill County in 1847.

Shortly after his marriage, he moved to Tremont and lived there until 1863, when he came north to the brand new borough of Mahanoy City.

The arrival of Ebenezer and

Mary Morris here provided a boost to the town's population, as they had 12 children. One of the boys, Abner, became the Lehigh Valley ticket agent here.

Four of the children had died by 1890. Those still living besides Abner were Joseph, Pottsville; John, Morea; Lincoln, Ebenezer, Mrs. William (Sarah) Schoener, Mrs. Alfred (Janet) Palmer, Mrs. Thomas (Gertrude) Powell, Mahanoy City.

The family resided at 337 W. Spruce St., where Mr. Morris died in 1892 at age 60.

TIMOTHY COCKILL made it possible for many people to get around in Mahanoy City during the horse and buggy era. He was a wheelwright whose trademark appeared on many of the wagons and carriages moving about the local streets in the days before the horseless carriage arrived to send him into retirement.

A native of Lewellyn, where he was born Oct. 21, 1853, he came to Mahanoy City about 1870. His parents, Ezra and Eliza (Bacon) Cockill, were natives of the Germantown section of Philadelphia.

From the little biographical information available on him, he resided at 939 E. Centre St. with his wife, Amelia Bensinger, a native of Tremont, and had three children, Mrs. Harry (Laura) Mayberry, Charles and Bella.