

## MAHANNOY CITY CHRONICLES

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Written by Bill O'Brien, Herald Writer  
Researched by Lorraine Stanton

Transcribed by  
Shirley E. Ryan  
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### RECOLLECTIONS OF SOME PIONEERS

Some of the early settlers of Mahanoy City were still around after the turn of the century and left recollections of the town's founding era.

One of them was **William H. Richards**, a long-tie colliery superintendent, who in 1921, was hailed as the town's oldest living pioneer. He also listed as the oldest active mining boss in Pennsylvania 70 years old and still putting in his daily shift at the colliery.

Mr. Richards first stepped foot in Mahanoy City on Feb 14, 1862, the day his parents brought the family here from Ringtown Valley. By 1921 he had inherited the status of town patriarch, after the death of two previous senior townsmen: Emanuel Boyer, the first permanent settler, and Christ Welter.

In an article in the Record-American in August 1921, Mr. Richards recalled how he arrived here in a family trek over the North Mahanoy Mountain via the old Catawissa Turnpike. He was born in Union Township in 1851 and was nine years old when his father decided to move to Mahanoy Valley and work in the coal industry.

The family packed bag and baggage (including chickens) onto a wagon, and young William walked the entire way, alongside the family cow, until they arrived at Tunnel Ridge Patch (now the site of the Mahanoy Area stadium and the Acme Market) where they moved into one of the company homes built by colliery operator George Cole for the colliery employees.

Mr. Richards recalled that the Mahanoy Creek then was alive with fish, and it was no unusual sight to see 20-inch trout being pulled from it.

If any of William Richards' descendents are still around the area, they can take pride in the role that the family patriarch played in making it possible for Mahanoy City to take its place on the map.

**JOHN KEHLEY** was another oldtimer mentioned in the Record-American during 1921. In September of that year he was here for a visit. He was then 80 years old and had been away from town 58 years, living in Williamsport, but had a brother-in-law, **Jack Reese**, living on West Centre Street.

Compared to the community he knew long ago, it was quite a different town that greeted John Kehley's eyes when he returned in 1921.

He was one of the very earliest pioneers on the local scene, having come from the Ringtown Valley in 1851 at the age of 10 years. At that time, Mahanoy City Borough was still 12 years in the future.

He recalled that the settlement then consisted of one house and one hotel. The house must have been the original historic log structure where John Reich hosted travelers on the Catawissa Turnpike during the late 1700s and early 1800s. The hotel, he said, was run by a man named Faust. This was probably Jacob Faust, who built the first hotel, known as the Mahanoy House, at 10 E Centre St., and sold it to Emanuel Boyer.

Mr. Kehley said he left the Mahanoy Valley for Williamsport in 1863, the year that Mahanoy City entered boroughhood. While living here he became one of the pioneer mine workers – one of the generation who built the collieries. He remembered working in the saw mills at the Tunnel Ridge and Lanigans (Ellangowen) – probably cutting the lumber used to erect the colliery buildings and the company homes at those sites.

He bore the same last name as Peter Kehley, the first settler on the site of Shenandoah between 1820 and 1835, but it isn't known whether John and Peter were related.

**WILLIAM KLINE** was one of the men who cleared away the forest to make room and provide lumber for the building of Mahanoy City.

Born in Nassau, Germany, in 1840, he came to America in 1856, settling in Ashland. In 1860 he obtained employment clearing the land on the present site of Mahanoy City. There were only 14 houses here at that time and he boarded at Maizeville until he was able to secure a local home.

When mines were being opened on every side, Mr. Kline turned his attention toward that occupation and became a proficient miner. In 1878 he was promoted to inside foreman at the Bowmans Colliery. However, his eyesight began to fail and he gave up the foremanship in 1897, taking lighter employment about the colliery. Worsening sight caused him to retire from active employment in 1900 and three years later he became totally blind. He lived his last 20 years without sight.

When Mr. Kline died in 1923, his obituary in the Record-American (Sept 24) said he was "probably Mahanoy City's oldest resident" (he was then living in Bowmans with his son, Harry).

His wife, Sarah, was also a Kline (daughter of John Kline) who came from Roaring Creek, Columbia County. At the time of her death on Dec 1, 1921, she and her husband were listed as the town's oldest couple.

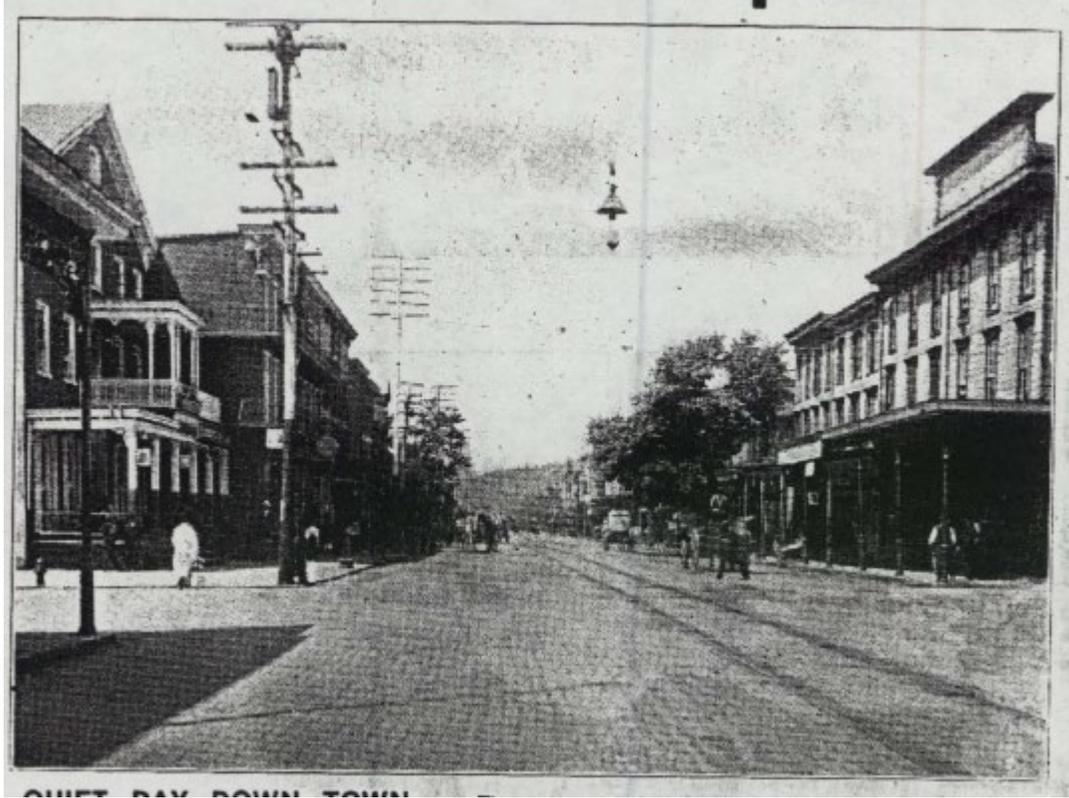
As reported in his obituary: “Mr. Kline and his spouse endured all the hardships that usually beset the pioneer. They saw the vast forest that covered the present town site disappear and in its place rise the hundreds of dwellings that took the place of the age-old trees”.

They were members of Saint Fidelis Church and were survived by the following children: Clara, wife of Thomas Hillibush, Robinsons; George Kline and Mrs. Frantz (Catherine) Kaier, Mahanoy City, Harry with whom they spent their aging years at Bowmans; Mrs. Matilda McNally, Girardville.

Son Harry was the outside foreman at North Mahanoy Colliery during the early decades of this century. He was nine years old when he started picking slate (Mahanoy City) Colliery in 1879. Five years later he transferred to the breaker at North Mahanoy Colliery. He eventually became a machinist and served as assistant outside foreman until 1904, when he went to the Potts Colliery, Locust Dale, as outside foreman. In 1907 he returned to North Mahanoy as outside foreman.

Harry’s first wife, Celie Burke, who died in 1909, bore seven children: William, Nicholas, Harry, Daniel, George, John, and a daughter who died in infancy. In 1912 he married Miss Tillie Graham, who bore a son, Edward, and a daughter who died in infancy.

The name of Kline is still prevalent in the area, and some of the local folks who carry that name probably are descendants of the pioneer, William, whose sweat and toil helped to pave the way for the town to celebrate its 125<sup>th</sup> year as a borough.



**QUIET DAY DOWNTOWN** - The beautiful throughfare that was Mahanoy City's Centre Street in decades past is captured in this 1913 view looking west from Main Street. A few horse-drawn wagons and carriages move leisurely along the cobblestone street dotted with shade trees and free of litter. A woman (left) pushes what appears to be a baby carried in front of the impeccably-kept Mansion House Hotel. A gentleman (right) lolls against a post supporting the sidewalk awning in front of the old Cooperative Building. What pioneer who arrived in the frontier town a half-century earlier could have envisioned such a transformation of the site then occupied by a handful of houses and a primeval forest?