

MAHANOY CITY CHRONICLES/Researched by Lorraine Stanton

He was a legend with P&RC&I

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Herald writer

IT'S DOUBTFUL that any other man in the history of anthracite mining matched the record of Nicholas F. Hoffman, late of Coles Patch, whose last job was master mechanic at Mahanoy City Colliery.

Nick was a legend with the Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company. At the time of his retirement on March 1, 1951, at the age of 80, he had completed 70 consecutive years of employment with that company. And what makes the record all the more remarkable is the fact that he never suffered a lost-time injury — an amazing accomplishment in an industry where death and crippling injuries were everyday occurrences.

Nick's achievement was duly recognized by the company during a program at Lakewood Ballroom in August 1951 when the company presented him with a solid gold pin containing three diamonds — the first service award ever given to any employee by the 80-year-old firm.

Mr. Hoffman was born in Tamaqua on Dec. 24, 1870, son of Frank and Mary (Kirchner) Hoffman. A few years later the family moved to Coles and young Nick began picking slate at the nearby Tunnel Ridge Breaker in 1880 at the age of 10.

During the 1880s and 1890s he worked at various colliery jobs including breaker pump runner, blacksmith helper and outside repairman. In 1900 he became a machinist which was to be his trade for the next half century. He worked at Tunnel Ridge until the colliery closed in 1932, then transferred to the Ellangowen and Maple Hill collieries until 1937, and finally became master mechanic at the Mahanoy City Colliery until he retired in 1951.

NO ONE was more important in the mining industry than the pump mechanic, whose expertise kept the underground passages from filling with water. And no one knew mine pumps better than Nick Hoffman. He lived with the pumps at Mahanoy City Colliery and cared for them as he would a member of his family.

During the era when mineworkers worked seven-hour shifts (contract miners' shifts were even shorter) and five-day weeks, Nick stayed at his post

around the clock when he felt it necessary. Six- and seven-day weeks were not unusual for him — and being a "monthly man" he worked those extra hours without extra pay.

His lunch can was simple to pack — a couple slices of unwrapped dry bread, a slab of steak or a long link of sausage fried the night before, and a supply of butts chewing tobacco.

He usually purchased his butts on his way to work at 5:30 a.m. In those days the small grocery stores opened at wee hours to serve the miners. Nick's favorite store was operated by Matt Gormas at the southeast corner of C and Centre streets.

Nick's after-work routine followed a regular pattern: home from the colliery to wash up and change clothes, then up town to Pieczul's Cafe in the 200 block of West Centre street to wash down the coal dust with rock-and-rye and Kaier's.

Summer evenings often found him down the patch enjoying a chew while resting on the glider swing which he built in the backyard just outside the cellar-kitchen.

Nick was married to the former Elizabeth Herman on Oct. 22, 1906. They had eleven children, all of whom are now deceased.

Two of Nick's grandsons are still living in Coles: Ed resides in old homestead at No. 21 and Tony (manager of the North Schuylkill Landfill) lives at No. 2.

NICK COULD have continued working past his 80th birthday had he wanted. When he hung up his hardboiler and boots for the last time he was still one of the most rugged men on the P&RC&I payroll — tough as nails, strong as an ox, alert of mind.

His decision to retire might have been an omen for the town. Three years later the company abandoned its deep mine operations and disaster descended upon the area.

In the months prior to the shutdown, the company conducted a public advertising campaign asking the miners to increase production to help keep the mines open. However, judging by comments at local union meetings, many of the contract miners — the bread and butter men who produced the raw coal — felt the company was bluffing and they rejected the thought of blasting out that extra car or two of coal.

Of course, no one could blame



MEMORALBE MINER — After 70 years of working in and around the mines, Nick Hoffman, left, is shown following his retirement in 1951. George Roos, vice president of the Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company, is shown presenting the oldtimer with a diamond-studded gold pin and a Holmes Safety Association certificate congratulating him for never having lost a day at work due to injury. The program was held at Lakewood Ballroom.

the miners for not wanting to increase their time in the hell holes. It was no picnic up in the breasts eating coal dust, suffering throbbing dynamite headaches and death lurking on all sides.

But the company pointed out that more coal was needed to provide more revenue to pay the many non-miner employees required to keep a colliery going.

So the inevitable happened. The mines were shut down and thousands of jobs were wiped out at one stroke. Mahanoy City would never again see the glory that it knew when coal was king.

JAMES McCABE was a pioneer mining man saw the anthracite industry in the Mahanoy Valley advance from its infancy through the boom years and into the era of decline.

He was only 22 years old but already had 12 years of mining experience when he arrived in Mahanoy City on Oct. 31, 1864. He

collieries until age 78, when he retired.

In 1890, according to the Schuylkill County Census Directory, the McCabe family lived at 208 W. Centre St. and included the parents, James and Catherine, and these children: William, 28, a trader boss; Francis, 23, a clerk; Joseph, 18, a teamster; Thomas, nine; Kate, Mary, Maude and Frances (no ages listed).

At the time of his death on Jan. 4, 1923, Mr. McCabe was residing at 524 E. Mahanoy St. and was survived only by his wife, Catherine, son, Joseph, and a daughter, Helen, at home, and daughters Mary and Mrs. William Whitaker in New York.

Jim McCabe lived in Mahanoy City during the six most exciting decades or the town's history. When he came here, the population was under 1,000. He saw the community mushroom through the years to its peak of 15,936 residents in 1910. When he departed this life in 1923, the long decline was underway, as indicated in the population drop to 15,599 in the 1920 census.

The McCabe name is still much in evidence on the local scene as the borough celebrates its 125th anniversary, and whether or not the McCabes of today are descendants of the family tree planted here 124 years ago by Jim McCabe, they can be proud of the legacy left by their namesake.

CARMITCHELL is a family name not to be found in Mahanoy City today, but just about everybody in town knew of the Carmitchells around the turn of the century when Charles and George, father and son, were mine bosses at various collieries.

Charles, the father, was a fire boss at Primrose Colliery, located just north of the borough on the Delano road, during the long and turbulent strikes of 1900 and 1902 which brought the national guard troops here to quell the violence. Those were the days when being a mine boss took a great deal of courage.

George Carmitchell, the son, was inside foreman at Tunnel Ridge Colliery in the 1920s and earlier.

CHARLES WAS born in Cumbola and worked in the mines there before moving to Ashland to follow the same occupation. Later he moved to Helfenstein and

stayed until 1892, when he was transferred to Northumberland County to serve as foreman at collieries in the Mount Carmel and Natalie areas.

He moved to Mahanoy City in 1900 and worked as a fire boss for several years at the Primrose mine. In 1904 he returned to Mount Carmel and died there a year later.

GEORGE WAS was born at Helfenstein on March 9, 1879, and went to work in the breakers picking slate at the age of 10. Two years later he was promoted to doortender and eventually became a miner at the Green Ridge and Richards collieries at Natalieo and Mount Carmel, where his father was bossing.

In 1900 he accompanied his father to Mahanoy City and both worked for a time at the Primrose Colliery. The father's health began to falter and he returned to Mount Carmel in 1904 but the son remained in Mahanoy City, having been appointed as a fire boss at Park Place Colliery in 1903. Four years later he moved to a similar position at the North Mahanoy Colliery owned by the Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company.

In 1911 the P&RC&I Company promoted him to assistant inside foreman at Tunnel Ridge Colliery and two years later he was promoted to inside foreman.

According to the J. H. Beers history of 1916, George and Jennie (Hubler) Carmitchell resided at 1311 E. Mahanoy St. with their children, Charles, Mabel, George, William, Thomas and Alice.

AS MAHANOY observes its 125th anniversary year, the name of Carmitchell is missing from the local scene. Possibly there are descendants carrying on the family name in the Mount Carmel area where the telephone directory lists W. K. Carmitchell (spelled with one l) residing at 138 S. Oak St. Two attempts were made to talk with him by telephone last week but he thought it was a salesman trying to sell him something and he abruptly hung up.

So as of now, it isn't known whether any descendants of the old and respected Mahanoy family are still around the region to share the memories left by Charles and George Carmitchell for Mahanoy City to contemplate in this year of its quasiquincentennial.