

MAHANOY CITY CHRONICLES/Researched by Lorraine Stanton

They helped to shape community

By **BILL O'BRIEN**
Herald writer

ROBERT PORTER SWANK'S prominence in the legal profession made him an estimable citizen of Mahanoy City during the early decades of the 20th century while the town was growing to its population peak.

He came from Delano, where he was born on Oct. 17, 1868, son of Joseph and Anna (Porter) Swank. His father was born at Mauch Chunk on Sept. 11, 1841, served in the Civil War and located at Delano to work on the Lehigh Valley Railroad. His mother was born in Ballycairn, Colerain, Ireland, on March 13, 1847.

Attorney Swank was a product of the Delano schools and distinguished himself at Pennsylvania State College where he was graduated in 1889. As a sophomore he won the James A. Beaver prize for excellence in mathematics, and as a senior won the national American Protective Tariff League Medal for an essay on the subject "Would Free Raw Materials Be Beneficial to Labor and Industry in the United States?" In later years he was a leader of campaigns to raise funds for Penn State.

After college he studied law under Attorney William Wilhelm in Pottsville and was admitted to the county bar on Feb. 13, 1893.

Attorney Swank served many years as solicitor of the Mahanoy City School District and in 1914 was elected by voters of the First

Schuylkill Legislative District to serve as a delegate to the Republican State Convention.

He was a board member at the Union National Bank and treasurer of the Mahanoy City Lumber Company.

On Nov. 15, 1899, he took Miss Ida Helper of Eldred Township as his bride. They had a daughter, Anna Catherine.

CARL SCHEURMAN was a pioneer unknown to modern residents of this town he did so much to help build.

Fortunately, his contributions were recorded in now-rare old biographical volumes still found in a few places around the county. One such book is the Samuel T. Wiley Biographical Cyclopedia of Schuylkill County published in 1893.

It's fitting that these old volumes should be dug out and the stories of men like Carl Scheurman retold so that Mahanoy's citizens today might appreciate the deeds of those who made it possible for the town to celebrate 125 years of boroughhood.

Carl Scheurman's portfolio contains these credits:

—He was one of the signers of the petition asking the county court for permission to create a self-governing borough.

—He personally helped to build the town, having been a skilled carpenter.

—He created a building and loan association so that immigrants could borrow funds to finance the construction of their homes.

—He helped organize the first Sabbath school at Saint Paul's Reformed Church.

—He was a leader in the movement to establish the German Protestant Cemetery which today harbors more former residents than lived in town at its population peak of 15,936 in 1910.

Born in Frankenburg, Germany, on March 15, 1820, Mr. Scheurman left his native land in 1853 accompanied by his wife, the former Elizabeth Schaumburg, and their children, Lena and Henry. They made their way to Tamaqua and lived there three years before moving to Tuscarora, then to Saint Clair and finally to Mahanoy City in 1861.

His first six years in Mahanoy were spent as a carpenter helping with the housing construction boom that came with expansion of the mining industry after the Mahanoy Tunnel brought the railroad here in 1863.

Mr. Scheurman built his own homestead in the German section of town, at the southwest corner of Sixth and Mahanoy street, where he opened a saloon in 1867.

In October 1874 he founded the German Building and Loan Association of which he was president. The treasurer was David Bowman, one of the coal operator brothers after whom Bowmans Patch is named, and the secretary was William Encke who operated a book and stationary store at 24 W. Centre St.

He died on March 13, 1878, two days before his 58th birthday.



R.P. Swank, Esq.

HENRY SCHEURMAN, son of Carl, was 10 years old when his family arrived in Mahanoy City. He grew up to be one of the most influential members of his generation here.

After working in and about the mines for several years, he left Mahanoy in 1872 at age 21 to serve a five-year enlistment in the U.S. Army. Most of his duty was spent in Wyoming, Utah and South Dakota as a member of General Crook's command, dealing with Indian troubles. Fate was with him when his enlistment ended and he returned home just in time to miss the battle of Little Bighorn where General Custer's forces were wiped out.

With the death of his father in 1878, Henry assumed operation of

the family saloon and other business enterprises. He also became involved in politics and served successive terms as a member of borough council, tax collector and justice of the peace. In 1890 he was elected Schuylkill County recorder of deeds.

He maintained the family tradition as a faithful member of Saint Paul's Reformed Church, and was active in the Citizens Fire Company.

JOHN DAVID RILEY was for many years a practicing physician in Mahanoy City. He came from a pioneer Mahanoy Plane family who descended from Schuylkill County's earliest Irish immigrant families.

Dr. Riley's father, John, was born in Pottsville in 1837 and prior to the Civil War came north to Mahanoy Plane where he opened the community's first store in partnership with William Thickers. He was also the machinist who erected and started up the first set of hoisting engines at West Bear Ridge Colliery, the first mining operation in that vicinity. The father lost his health while serving in the army during the Civil War and was a semi-invalid from then until his death in Shenandoah in 1877 at age 40.

Dr. Riley's mother, the former Matilda Ferguson, also was born at Pottsville in 1837 and remained in Shenandoah after her husband's death.

The doctor was educated in Shenandoah schools and graduated with honors from the University of Pennsylvania Medical College. He began his

Mahanoy City practice shortly thereafter and was married on Sept. 11, 1895, to the former Elizabeth Thompson, whose parents, David and Alice (Timmons) Thompson, were early settlers of southern Schuylkill County. The doctor and his wife had three children, Matilda, John and Alice.

JOSEPH H. GARRAHAN began his working career picking slate in a breaker boy and finished it as an attorney in Mahanoy City.

He was born at Kelayres, Kline Township, on May 3, 1874, son of Hugh and Mary (Stapleton) Garrahan. His father, a native of Nesquehoning, served three years in the Civil War.

After a boyhood picking slate at the Honey Brook breaker, young Joseph, at age 14, decided to be like his brothers, Hugh, Edward and Daniel, and become a Lehigh Valley railway telegrapher. At age 18 he realized that goal and worked at it for 10 years, but finally decided he wanted to be like one of his other brothers, Thomas, who was a Pottsville lawyer.

After an apprenticeship with Attorney James J. Moran, Pottsville, Joseph was admitted to the county bar on July 28, 1902, and opened his practice in Mahanoy City.

He was married on Oct. 24, 1906, to the former Nellie O'Donnell of Hazleton. In addition to the aforementioned brothers, he had one other, James, a banker in New York City, and two sisters, Margaret and Ellen, both of Easton.