

## MAHANOY CITY CHRONICLES/Researched by Lorraine Stanton

# A land agent and two newsmen

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Herald writer

**TODAY WE'LL** take a look at three men who were well known in Mahanoy City of yore because of their lines of work, one as a coal company land agent, the others as executives with local newspapers.

**THOMAS L. HESS** was serving as the Philadelphia and Reading Company land agent at the Mahanoy City office, Main and Pine streets (now occupied by the McCann School of Business) when he was ushered in semi-retirement by the company in July 1924.

An early resident of the town, he had worked for the P&R for 56 years (since 1868) and went out to pasture with the emeritus title of "consulting land agent."

The Record-American said of his semi-retirement: "His duties will be greatly lessened but his valued experience gained by years of faithful performance of duty will always be a valuable asset."

The paper also said of him: "He is a far-thinking citizen and, with our forefathers, helped to build this substantial town of Mahanoy City."

Much of his non-working life was devoted to church and masonic activities. He was a Sunday school worker at the Methodist Church, secretary of the F&M Lodge 357 and a regular attendant at state and national masonic conventions.

**D. HIRAM MORGAN** served as the editor of two Mahanoy City newspapers and had a bright career ahead of him until neglect of his health cost him his life.

He died Aug. 14, 1924, aged 43 years. Death was attributed to peritonitis from inflamed ap-

pendix which his doctor had advised him to have removed three years earlier.

"Hi" Morgan was born Nov. 17, 1880, in Elmira, N.Y., where his father, Rev. T. P. Morgan, was a Baptist minister. The family came to Mahanoy City in 1897 and "Hi" was graduated from high school here in 1898.

He taught in the local schools for two years and then joined the staff of the Mahanoy City Record. He was with the paper 19 years and was serving as editor when it was merged in 1919 with the Mahanoy City American, to form the Record-American.

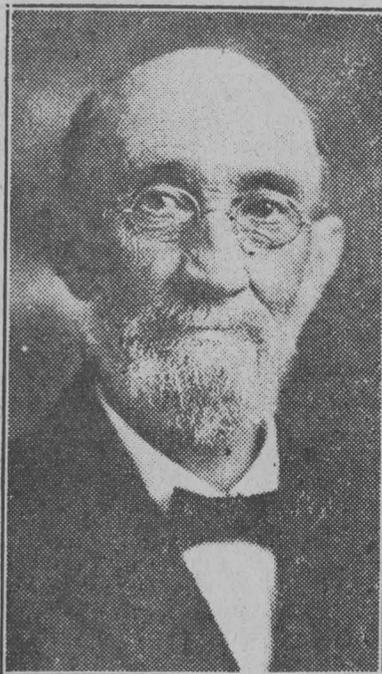
Mr. Morgan then went to Shenandoah and worked for the Evening Herald for three years. In 1922 he was lured back to Mahanoy City to serve as editor of William Barr's newly founded Mahanoy Press which put out its first edition on July 31, 1922. The paper later became an organ of the United Mine Workers of America, District 9, and "Hi" Morgan was still serving as editor at the time of his death in 1924. The paper went out of existence in July 1926 when it was sold to the Record-American.

During the early 1920s, Morgan served as the publicity representative for Locust Mountain State Hospital and as a member of the Mahanoy City School Board.

At the time of his death, he had a sister, Rebecca, teaching school in Mahanoy City; a brother, Joseph, working as a druggist in Nanticoke; and a sister, Mrs. E. Grant Doherty, living in Philadelphia.

**DAVID B. DAVIES** was as well-known for his avocation, which was music, as he was for his vocation, which was business manager of the Record-American.

He died unexpectedly on Jan. 6,



**Thomas L. Hess**  
P&R land agent

1936 at the age of 52 years.

A descendent of one of Mahanoy City's earliest families, he was born Dec. 23, 1883, son of David and Mary (Morgan) Davies. His maternal grandfather, John Morgan, was one of the borough's founding fathers who signed the petition for chartering the borough.

David started to learn printing as an apprentice with the Mahanoy Tribune but left the print shop to take a job at the Primrose breaker.

Like so many sons and daughters of Saint David, young Mr. Davies was blessed with vocal talent. As a young man he went on a short concert tour but wasn't fond of life on the road and decided to stay home near family and friends.

He took a local job briefly selling insurance for Prudential, but left it in 1905 to become a collector for the Mahanoy Record. When the paper merged with the American Tribune in 1919 he became business manager of the new Record-American.

In meantime he pursued his love for music and established a reputation as one of the most adept and versatile in the region. He became a consistent winner and an arbiter in eisteddfod competitions, served as a choral director in church (First Methodist) and community, was in demand as a soloist at sacred, fraternal and secular musical functions, directed the community glee club and organized the Mahanoy City Orpheus Society which introduced classical musical presentations to local audiences in 1931.

He was appointed to the Mahanoy City School Board to succeed his late friend and former newspaper associate, "Hi" Morgan, subject of the item above.

After the death of his first wife, Gwennie Davies (their two children died in infancy) he married Pearl Phillips Palmer, who survived him.

He also left three brothers and two sisters: John, a local plumber; William and Joseph of New York; Mrs. Ben (Gwennie) Walters of Mahanoy City; Mrs. Patricia Woodruff of Wallingford.

**BELIEVE IT** or not, there's a case on record of a man having drowned in the Mahanoy Creek within the borough.

There'd been instances of people, horses and vehicles falling into the creek back in the days when it wasn't covered, but most were retrieved from the channel with little more than their dignities hurt.

The only known fatality was reported in the Record-American on March 26, 1924, as follows:

The body of James Mundy, who lived at 19 South Tenth Street, was found in the Mahanoy Creek in the 900 square of East Market Street this morning about 7:15 o'clock.

The gruesome find was made by Frony Spotts, a plasterer doing work in the neighborhood, and Reese Llewellyn, who lives on Centre Street in the 900 square.

Local authorities were notified and supervised the taking of the body from the creek channel. It was determined he had been dead for several hours.

There was no evidence of foul play. His money, watch and other valuables remained untouched in the pockets of his clothing.

The theory advanced by the authorities is that while walking along the creek he suffered a spell and dropped to the channel. There was a bruise over his left eye where his head struck a large rock, apparently rendering him unconscious, and he lay face down in the murky water, drowning.

Deceased made his home with his sister, Mrs. Helen McGinnis, who is his only survivor. He was born in Tamaqua but lived practically all his life in town.

**JOHN BITTNER** called Mahanoy City his home for only a brief while but he was here long enough to become one of the few men who enlisted from here to serve in the Civil War.

Born at Mainville, Columbia County, on Feb. 24, 1836, he was nine years old when his father died. There were no coal mines around Mainville where boys of his age could earn their keep, so he was sent to do farm work, which brought him to Schuylkill County and the farm of Daniel Hummel in West Brunswick

Township.

At age 21 he forsook the farm life and became a carpenter in Tamaqua. Later going to Audenreid and worked with the railroad crews laying track for the Lehigh Valley line which was under construction from Carbon County through the Quakake Valley and eventually would come into Mahanoy City.

On April 7, 1860, at age 24, he married Caroline Fausf, a resident of Packer Township, Carbon County, and they decided to settle in the newly sprouting town of Mahanoy City.

However, their stay here was cut short by the war of rebellion. When Pennsylvania was invaded by rebel troops, John Bittner answered President Lincoln's call for volunteers. He enlisted for three years in Company F, 187th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, and never returned to Mahanoy.

After surviving the Battle of Cold Harbor, Siege of Richmond and engagements along the Weldon railroad, Private Bittner was mustered out and rejoined his wife at her family homestead in Packer Township.

For a short time he operated a grist mill there but gave it up and bought the farm of his father-in-law, John Faust. It was there that he and his wife spent the remainder of their lives. Their family numbered 15 children, the last of whom was born in 1885.

Today's descendants of John and Caroline Bittner probably know little if anything about Mahanoy City, the town where some of them might be living had the Civil War not come along.

Brief though his time here may have been, John Bittner etched his name on scroll of history as one of the pioneers who exemplified the spirit of patriotism that has been evident in the hearts of Mahanoy's people for 125 years.