

MAHANOEY CITY CHRONICLES/Researched by Lorraine Stanton

A study in the American dream...

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Herald writer

WHEN THOMAS LYON came to Mahanoy City 118 years ago, his goal was to be a school teacher, but by the time the new century dawned, he was The Honorable Thomas H. B. Lyon, judge of the Schuylkill County Orphans Court.

His biography is a study in the American dream: a man with the courage to change careers in mid-life and go on to reach the pinnacle in his new profession.

Judge Lyon came from all-American lineage. It's doubtful that any other person among the countless thousands who called Mahanoy City home during the last 125 years could match his American credentials. On both sides of his family tree, his ancestors fought in the war for independence, and one of them gave his life for the cause.

His mother's ancestors were prominent New England colonists. Her father, a Sampson, and his uncle fought in the Revolutionary War, and her mother's two brothers, David

and Daniel Heacock, fought in both the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812.

On the judge's paternal side, greatgrandfather Lyons gave his life while serving in General Washington's army at the Battle of Trenton.

THE LYON ancestors found their way to Pennsylvania via the colonial migration across upstate New York. After the Revolutionary war, the judge's paternal family settled in the northeastern corner of Pennsylvania, now the site Susquehanna County. His father, Jacob Lyon, was born there on July 20, 1796.

His mother, Mahala Sampson, was born on the New York side of the border on Nov. 14, 1797. At that time there was no Schuylkill County (Schuylkill was created March 1, 1811) and the existence of Mahanoy City was more than half a century in the future (December 1863).

Judge Lyon was born in Clifford Township, Susquehanna County, on Sept. 26, 1841. Although teaching was his



Thomas H. B. Lyon
Teacher to judge

chosen profession when he arrived in Mahanoy City, it was evident from his background that law was in the back of his mind.

After graduation from

Wyoming Seminary School, he undertook a study of law under the illustrious J. B. McCollum of Mount Rose, former chief justice of the United States Supreme Court.

There's no biographical information to indicate what his occupation may have been in Susquehanna County, but when he arrived in Mahanoy City in 1870, accompanied by his bride of one year (Jane V. Meyers), he took a position as a teacher and remained in that occupation for several years.

Eventually, his interest returned to law and he put out his shingle at 66 S. Main St. Through his practice and his active participation in Republican politics, particularly his ability as an orator at campaign rallies, he became well-known throughout the region. Thus it was no surprise when Governor Daniel Hastings appointed him to serve as judge of the orphans court in 1895. By the time he completed the term he was past his 60th birthday and decided to retire from the bench and concentrate on his

law practice, which he continued past his 80th year.

For many years he was the solicitor for borough council, a post he held at the time of his death.

In November 1921, at the age of 80, he accepted an appointment by Governor William Sproat to serve on a state commission to investigate mine cave-ins. However, six months later he suffered a heart attack and died at his main street home.

His affiliations in town included Faith Episcopal Church, Odd Fellows, Knights of the Golden Eagle, POSofA, all now gone from the scene, also the Masonic Lodge and Elks Lodge.

JUDGE LYON'S wife also came from a family of American patriots. Her greatgrandfather, Philip Sheaffer, was a member of General Washington's army which wintered at Valley Forge and fought in the Battle of Trenton.

Having such kinship to history, she was keenly aware of

the importance of recording the story of Mahanoy City as she witnessed it unfolding.

On May 31, 1905, at a session of the Historical Society of Schuylkill County, she unveiled a history of the town, a work which has stood the test of time for reliability and authenticity.

Being herself of historic lineage, Mrs. Lyon realized the value of staying attuned to the march of time and preserving the story for the benefit of generations to come. She wrote from the vantage point of one who lived the history, and was able to describe earlier events by interviewing pioneers who had witnessed them. Her account of the Mahanoy Tunnel saga is priceless.

As the borough's quasiquintennial year unfolds, the community can appreciate the true value of the gift that historians such as Mrs. Jane Lyon have left for us.

Judge and Mrs. Lyon had two daughters, Una and Asia, only one of whom (Mrs. Frank C. Ball) was alive at the time of the judge's demise.