

MAHANAY CITY CHRONICLES/Researched by Lorraine Stanton

Pioneers who shaped Mahanoy...

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Herald writer

THE NAME OF John J. Coyle won't raise any eyebrows in Mahanoy City today, but the town wouldn't have been the same without him.

He was a pioneer teacher, a state legislator, a coal operation and a financier, but his most valuable contribution to a generation of Mahanoy Valley residents was the establishment of the trolley system.

For 37 years (1892-1927) the trolleys were the principal mode of local mass transportation connecting Mahanoy City, Shenandoah, Girardville, Ashland and the mine patches in between. The cars also had ran to Pottsville and had a connection with the Northumberland County trolley system serving Mount Carmel, Shamokin and other important towns in that county.

JOHN COYLE was born in Norwegian Township on Nov. 10, 1863, one of seven children of Irish immigrants Philip and Julia (Duffy) Coyle, who settled in Schuylkill County in the mid-1830s.

When John was five years old, his father, a miner, moved the family to the Centralia area and remained there four years before finally moving to Mahanoy Township in 1872.

John managed to educate himself well enough to become a school teacher at age 16. He taught in the Mahanoy Township

district for three years and then in Foster Township, Luzerne County, for another three years.

In 1885 he left teaching and became a bookkeeper for the J. P. McDonald Company in Freeland. A year later he returned to Mahanoy City and opened his own insurance agency on West Centre Street. The business flourished and gained Mr. Coyle a status of prominence and respect.

With the population of the valley growing rapidly, Mr. Coyle was one of the men with foresight to see the need for a more convenient form of mass transportation. Trains served that purpose to some extent but their range was limited, being unable to reach many of the outlying villages and not able to run up the center of streets as a trolley could.

When the proposal for a trolley line began to snowball, John Coyle was in the forefront as a capitalist and prime organizer. He was a principal in the original company incorporated as the "Mahanoy City, Shenandoah, Girardville and Ashland Street Railway Company." Later the company was sold to the Schuylkill Traction Company.

JOHN COYLE'S interest in politics got him an appointment from Governor James Beaver in 1889 to fill a vacancy as justice of the peace in the borough's first ward.

His next step up the political ladder was the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, to which he was elected in 1892. Following his stint in the house,



John J. Coyle
Trolley pioneer

he was elected to a term in the state senate.

Around the turn of the century he left political office and became involved in the coal business and banking which he continued until after World War I.

The dawning of the Roaring 20s found him moving to Philadelphia on a new banking venture. In partnership with John W. Phillips, former cashier of the

John J. Coyle after that is not known.

CHARLES F. KING was another pioneer resident of Mahanoy City who served in both chambers of the Pennsylvania legislature. However, his was best known as proprietor of the Mansion House Hotel for 10 years leading up to the turn of the century.

Mr. King's Mahanoy connection began after he had returned from Civil War duty. He originated in Delaware, having been born at Wilmington on Oct. 4, 1841, one of seven children of James and Mary (Fox) King.

His grandfather and named-sake was an immigrant from Germany who spent his life in this country as a member of the U.S. Navy. He saw duty in the War of 1812 and the Mexican War in which he commanded a ship.

IT'S A LONG way from birth in Wilmington to prominence in Mahanoy City, but here's how young Charles King made the journey:

In 1842, when he was one year old, his family moved to Philadelphia and remained six years. In 1848 they moved again, this time to Minersville.

The father initially made his living as a carpenter but eventually became a colliery superintendent. He was 50 years old when he died in Girardville in 1867.

At the age of 10, Charles got himself a job in a Minersville general store as an errand boy

and later a clerk. At age 16 he took a colliery job at one of the operations supervised by his father.

CHARLES was 20 years old when the Civil War broke out and he immediately returned to Delaware to join the Union Army. After two years he was discharged to recuperate from illness, but soon returned to uniform and spent the remainder of the war in the Army of the Potomac.

After returning to civilian life he headed for the two-year-old borough of Mahanoy City and took a job as station agent for the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad. Two years later became a railroad contractor and prosperity followed.

Politics called in 1871 and he was elected to the house of representatives, serving for six years. In 1882 he ran successfully for the state senate and served another six years.

He was one of the capitalists who organized the Union National Bank in 1889. He also served as a trustee of the Miners Hospital at Fountain Springs.

The 1890 census directory for Mahanoy City shows Charles King residing at 2 W. Centre St., the Mansion House Hotel, which he had purchased from Wilbur Smith, the original owner from its owning in 1861. The King household included his wife, Sarah, and children Sallie, Juanita, Edmund, Bayard and George.