

## MAHANOY CITY CHRONICLES

# Clifford led famed march unit

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Herald writer

ONE OF THE most famous parade groups in the county during the latter 1800s was the Young Men's Republican Club marching unit of Mahanoy City.

Dressed in caps, blue and white capes, leggings and carrying touchlights, the group won plaudits wherever it appeared and did much to keep the Republican Party in the public's eye.

The leader of the YMRC marching unit was William "Cap" Clifford.

In those days, Cap earned his living as a teamster, one of the unsung heroes of the world of commerce who went out in all kinds of weather to mount the wagons and drive the horses that kept goods moving.

Cap was born in Lanigans Patch (Ellangowen), son of James and Mary (Francis) Clifford. His father later became the first chairman of the District Mine Examining Board and served in that capacity for many years.

The family came to Mahanoy City from Lanigans in the 1870s, and Cap's first job, as a young boy, was picking slate in the breaker at Coles Colliery (Tunnel Ridge). As a teenager he worked

as a laborer beside his father at Foulkes Colliery until he took a job driving wagon for Seligman Hardware Company. Eventually the Seligman firm was succeeded by H. J. Heiser Hardware Company and Cap stayed on to work for the new owner.

Because of his leadership and service to the party as a member of the Young Men's Republican Club, he was offered a position at the local post office as assistant to Postmaster David Graham. But he didn't jump at the offer. He was reluctant to leave his horses and it took some coaxing by the Republican officials until he agreed to accept. But once he took the job, he stuck with it. He began at the post office in 1902 and spent the next 32 years there, retiring on Jan. 1, 1934.

Cap and his wife, the former Winnie Williams, were married August 28, 1888, in the parsonage of the Methodist Church in Tamaqua by Rev. G. Orwin, a former pastor in Mahanoy City. The couple lived to celebrate their golden wedding anniversary.

Winnie was born in Mahanoy City, daughter of William and Margaret (Jones) Williams, whose homestead was in the 500 block of East Centre street, across from the high school. Winnie's maternal grandparents, Rees and Gwennlian Jones, were



**MEMORABLE PAIR** — William and Winnie (Williams) Clifford are pictured on their 50th wedding anniversary in 1938. Before the turn of the century Bill, nicknamed "Cap," led the famous Young Men's Republican marching unit. Later he became the town's assistant postmaster.

pioneer settlers in town.

The Cliffords made their home at 133 E. Pine St. and had two daughters: Ethel, who married Thomas Edwards and located in Scranton, and Mary, who married William Richelderfer and lived at

135 E. Pine St., next to her parents.

**THE MOST** celebrated piece of fire apparatus in the history of the Mahanoy City Fire Department was "Major."

This item from the Record-American 66 years ago tells the story:

Feb 22, 1922 — Members of the Citizens Fire Company celebrated two birthdays today — George's and Major's.

You all know about George, the father of our country and all that sort of thing, but perhaps you don't know much about the other, because Major never appears in public unless the fiery monster breaks loose and starts on a career of destruction.

For Major, you see, is the steam engine belonging to the Citizens Fire Company. He (Or is it she?) came into the possession of the Citizens on Feb. 22, 1872. The boys who composed the company at that time made a big fuss and held a celebration in honor of his arrival. Major was the last word in fire steamers and the boys were proud of him.

Money to purchase the steamer was raised through popular subscription. Residents of the town subscribed but the biggest donation came from Mrs. Wilber Smith, wife of the Mansion House proprietor, who gave \$500. In recognition of her generosity, the boys named the new steamer "Lady F. Smith." The name was changed a few years later to honor of George Major, the company foreman and chief burgess who was fatally shot in

March 1874 during a disturbance at a fire scene.

The steamer was purchased from the Silsbee company and is a splendid mechanism. It was remodeled in 1894 with new and improved parts. In 1918, new tubes were installed. The boiler is equipped with 196 tubes.

Ralph Lee and Adam Brown were the first eningeers to handle Major. Today, the duty falls to James Stride, one of the company's oldest members and chief engineer for the past 20 years. His regular employment is engineer at Tunnel Ridge Colliery.

Engineer Stride had Major out for a test this morning and said the engine is as good today as the day it was purchased. With only 18 pounds of steam the pump lifted water from the creek channel at second street and threw two streams from a plug, maintaining 140 pounds pressure with ease. The steamer has a capacity of 500 gallons per minute and usually carries 120 pounds of steam.

It has worked at all of the big fires in town during the last half century and has performed at fires in Ashland, Girardville and Shenandoah. One time when a culm bank was on fire at Lawtons' Colliery (Glendon Patch) the engine pumped for 36 consecutive hours.