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MAHANoy CITY 1863-1900:
A STUDY IN URBAN LEADERSHIP

BY

ROBERT THOMAS FALLAN

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Advisory Committee: H. Benjamin Powell, Chairman

John J. Serff, Jr.

James R. Sperry

Date: 8/16/79

PREFACE

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INTRODUCTION

The borough of Mahanoy City, Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania, has a history deeply involved with the coal industry. The following work will examine the close relationship of urban growth and industrial growth. An attempt will be made to identify the leadership roles which developed from 1863 to 1900 in Mahanoy City.

During the last half of the nineteenth century Mahanoy City developed from a small collection of houses into a borough of substantial size and importance. The physical growth of the town will be described as well as the political and economical gains that accompanied increased coal production. As the size of the borough increased, the municipal services necessary for urban living also expanded, and these services will also be discussed.

An attempt will be made to identify the internal leadership circles which developed and most importantly the reasons for such development. The economical, political and social factors which created the early leaders of Mahanoy City will be examined in depth and evaluated.

CHAPTER I

Background and Foundation of Mahanoy City

Mahanoy City, located in northeastern Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania, has been selected to study urban growth and leadership in nineteenth-century Pennsylvania. Much of what occurred in Mahanoy City also took place in other mining towns. While this thesis offers a starting point, studies of other towns must be done to acquire a completely comprehensive picture of urban leadership in the anthracite fields of Pennsylvania. In a short study of this nature it is impossible to study the urban growth of all the towns of anthracite Pennsylvania, but several will be mentioned for comparison.

The coal mining industry provided the basis for the urban growth of Mahanoy City. In addition, the industry provided a basis of power for the early civic leaders of the town. Early coal operators, most notably Edward S. Silliman and George Wiggan, emerged as town promoters and political leaders deriving their power initially from their coal operations. As the town grew in the 1870s and 1880s Mahanoy City offered a wide range of business and municipal services. From this increased activity town leaders emerged from other business circles, most notably Charles D. Kaier, owner and operator of the Chas. D. Kaier Brewery.

This study will examine the leadership provided by Mahanoy City as a borough as well as the internal leadership circles which developed in nineteenth-century Mahanoy City. The supreme importance of the coal

industry to the success and prosperity of Mahanoy City will become evident in the study.

Mahanoy City, located in the eastern end of the Mahanoy basin along the Mahanoy Creek, lies between the Locust and Broad Mountains. The Mahanoy basin measures twenty-five miles in length, with a mean breadth of less than two miles and contains forty-one square miles.¹ In this coal abundant basin several towns developed in the 1860s and 1870s, namely Ashland, Girardville, Shenandoah, and Mahanoy City.

The town was originally laid out by Patrick W. Sheaffer, Esq., of Pottsville in June, 1858, upon the lands held by Messrs. Troutman, Dundass and Biddle of Philadelphia and Messrs. Kear and Patterson, the former of Minersville, the latter of Pottsville.² The earliest advertisement for land in Mahanoy City is found in the July 25, 1859, issue of the Pottsville Miners Journal under new advertisements, stating "Lots in Mahanoy City for sale apply to John Anderson, Agt. Tamaqua; or to Frank Carter, Agt. Pottsville".³

Several settlers had preceded the first survey of the town plot. Emmanuel Boyer, regarded as the first permanent settler in Mahanoy City, erected his building in 1853 on a lot located near the Mahanoy Creek which is now Main Street on the south side facing what is now Center Street.⁴ Boyer was asked by the Little Schuylkill Company to settle in Mahanoy City in order to keep possession of a tract of land which they

¹Pennsylvania, Legislative Documents 1874 (Harrisburg, 1875), I: 201.

²Miners Journal, Pottsville, February 23, 1861.

³Ibid., June 25, 1859.

⁴Joseph Henry Zerbey, ed., History of Pottsville and Schuylkill County (Pottsville, 1935), III: 1262.

purchased. The initial building erected by Boyer but owned by the Little Schuylkill Company served as the forerunner of Mahanoy City.⁵

Boyer's holdings consisted of three lots, two of which were purchased by John C. Knapp, who conducted a butcher shop in the vicinity and who constructed a Fairbanks weigh scale at the northeastern corner of Main and Market Streets.⁶ Frank Carter, a pioneer settler of Mahanoy City built his home at the southeastern corner of Main and Maple Streets at the base of the Pottsville Road.⁷

Having these initial settlers, Mahanoy City awaited the population boom necessary for urban growth and prosperity. The impetus for this boom was provided by the opening of the Mahanoy basin to mining activity in the early 1860s. This opening, however, relied upon the establishment of an effective transportation system throughout the basin, connecting it with markets to the north and south.

The transportation system which will be studied at a later point greatly stimulated the anthracite coal industry of the Mahanoy basin. The founding, early growth, and development of the mining industry in the Mahanoy basin coincided with the development of several boroughs in the basin. The borough of Ashland in the western end of the basin supported and served much of Butler Township. Shenandoah in the middle served as the urban center for West Mahanoy Township with its villages of Lost Creek and William Penn. Mahanoy City in the east served as the focal point for the villages of Delano to the north, Boston Run, Wiggans, and St. Nicholas to the west and New Boston, Morea, and Locust Valley to the south.

⁵W. W. Munsell, History of Schuylkill County (New York, 1881): 229-230.

⁶Zerbey, History of Pottsville and Schuylkill County, III: 1264.

⁷Ibid.

Commenting in 1885 upon this pattern of urban development in the Mahanoy basin, Joel B. McCamont, chief of the Pennsylvania Bureau of Industrial Statistics, remarked:

The extent of the development of the Middle coal field in the past twenty-five years is a wonderful revelation even to this progressive age. In a section of the State, the greater part of which was then primeval forest, is now located the thriving towns of Shamokin, Mount Carmel, Ashland, Shenandoah and Mahanoy City, each the center of a large outlying mining population.⁸

This pattern of development was characteristic of the entire anthracite region of nineteenth-century Pennsylvania. In each of the three anthracite fields large cities developed which controlled outlying areas. Around each city in the fields several smaller towns developed as satellites of the main city.

It would be beneficial to take a brief look at the population of other towns and cities which developed in the anthracite regions of Pennsylvania. This would provide a means of comparison in studying the growth of Mahanoy City.

The anthracite regions of Pennsylvania were divided into three fields. First, the Wyoming-Lackawanna or Northern District, the largest producer of coal, with its major cities of Wilkes-Barre and Scranton and the smaller communities of Pittston, Carbondale, Nanticoke, and Plymouth lying in Luzerne and Lackawanna Counties. Thirty miles south is the Lehigh or Middle District, the smallest producer of the three fields, with much of the activity centered around Hazleton. Finally, the Schuylkill Field which includes two geographical divisions. The Schuylkill Field encompasses the western middle sector, reaching from near Carbon

⁸Pennsylvania, Legislative Documents 1885 (Harrisburg, 1886): 50.

County to Columbia and Northumberland Counties, and the Southern basin, lying from just east of Tamaqua almost entirely in Schuylkill and Dauphin Counties.⁹

The table on the following page gives the population statistics for the major coal towns and cities in the three anthracite fields from 1850 to 1900.

⁹Victor Greene, The Slavic Community on Strike (Notre Dame, 1968): 2-5.

TABLE I

Population of Major Anthracite Mining Centers 1850-1900							
	County	1850 ^a	1860 ^b	1870 ^b	1880 ^c	1890 ^c	1900 ^c
Ashland	Schuylkill	-	-	5,714	6,052	7,346	6,438
Carbondale	Lackawanna	4,945	-	6,393	7,714	10,833	13,356
Frackville	Schuylkill	-	-	-	1,707	2,520	2,594
Gilberton	Schuylkill	-	-	-	3,098	3,687	4,373
Girardville	Schuylkill	-	-	-	2,730	3,584	3,666
Hazleton	Luzerne	-	1,707	4,317	6,935	11,872	14,230
Mahanoy City	Schuylkill	-	573*	5,533	7,181	11,286	13,504
Minersville	Schuylkill	2,944	4,024	3,699	3,249	3,504	4,815
Mt. Carmel	Northumberland	-	-	1,289	2,378	8,254	13,179
Nanticoke	Lackawanna	-	-	-	3,884	10,044	12,116
Pittston	Luzerne	-	3,682	6,760	7,472	10,302	12,556
Plymouth	Luzerne	-	-	2,684	6,065	9,344	13,649
Pottsville	Schuylkill	7,303	9,444	12,384	13,253	14,117	15,710
Scranton	Lackawanna	3,000	9,223	35,092	45,850	75,215	102,026
Shamokin	Northumberland	2,191	-	4,320	8,184	14,403	18,202
Shenandoah	Schuylkill	-	-	2,915	10,147	15,944	20,321
St. Clair	Schuylkill	2,016	4,901	5,726	4,149	3,680	4,638
Tamaqua	Schuylkill	-	4,919	5,960	5,730	6,054	7,267
Wilkes-Barre	Luzerne	2,723	4,253	10,174	23,339	37,718	51,721

Source: ^aUnited States, Bureau of Census, Seventh Census of the United States (Washington, D. C., 1853): 150-190.

^bUnited States, Bureau of Census, Ninth Census of the United States (Washington, D. C., 1872), I: 230-310.

^cUnited States, Bureau of Census, Twelfth Census of the United States (Washington, D. C., 1901): 80-200.

Statistics in the preceding table reveal that in the northern field the city of Scranton, the seat of Lackawanna County, was the largest city in the three coal fields. Scranton retained an extremely large growth rate throughout the last half of the nineteenth century and by 1900 became the only city in the anthracite region of Pennsylvania to have over 100,000 inhabitants. Wilkes-Barre, twenty miles southwest of Scranton, was the second largest city in the three hard coal fields and served as the seat of government for its home county of Luzerne. Both Scranton and Wilkes-Barre were complemented by satellite towns in the form of Carbondale, Pittston, and Plymouth which individually achieved a population and size similar to Mahanoy City.

Hazleton, the major city of the Lehigh anthracite field, maintained a population and growth rate very similar to Mahanoy City, being slightly less populous until 1890 when it outgrew Mahanoy City by almost six-hundred residents. In comparison, the commercial center of the southern field and seat of Schuylkill County justice, Pottsville, although having an earlier beginning than Scranton could not compete in terms of population with the leading northern field city by the middle of the 1870s.

Speaking strictly of Schuylkill County, table one shows that before 1860 the majority of residents lived south of the Broad Mountain in Minersville, St. Clair, and Pottsville. The borough of Pottsville served as the leading town in Schuylkill County for two distinct reasons. Pottsville as early as 1825 was the commercial center of the county having direct access to Philadelphia by way of the Schuylkill Canal.¹⁰

¹⁰Eliot Jones, The Anthracite Coal Combinations in the United States With Some Early Developments of the Anthracite Industry (Cambridge, 1914): 18.

Also, by 1840 the borough could proudly boast of several iron and boiler works, tanyards, several hotels and efficient gas and water works serving the city.¹¹

Another reason for Pottsville's leadership in the early development of Schuylkill County can be attributed to the location of the county court house in that city in 1847.¹² The court house was initially located south of Pottsville in Orwigsburg. The location of the seat of county justice in Pottsville made it a natural focal point of activity for the lawyers, politicians, and businessmen of the county. Having both the commercial and governmental centers within its borough limits, Pottsville retained a strong and constant population growth throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century.

In contrast, Minersville and St. Clair grew slowly from a combined 1850 population of 4,690 to only 9,543 in 1900. Minersville and St. Clair lacked the commercial advantages of Pottsville, depending solely on mining for their economic life. As mining activity developed in the Mahanoy basin, the towns of the basin began to prosper, and by the turn of the century both Mahanoy City and Shenandoah could individually claim populations exceeding thirteen thousand.

The rich coal reserves of the Mahanoy basin, along with the prosperity it offered, enabled the towns located in the basin to overcome their late beginnings and surpass the older towns south of Broad Mountain. By 1900 the two northern Schuylkill County towns of Mahanoy City and Shenandoah were among the thirty-six cities of Pennsylvania

¹¹Zerby, History of Pottsville and Schuylkill County, V: 2089-2113.

¹²Munsell, History of Schuylkill County: 231.

having a population in excess of ten thousand residents.¹³ Both boroughs shared in the domination of the northern Schuylkill area, each catering to large borough populations as well as to the mining patch towns surrounding them.

Patch towns developed in the early 1860s in northern Schuylkill County around the mines and collieries operating there. Patch towns received names from two main sources. Some, such as Suffolk and St. Nicholas were named because of the name of the colliery operating where the patch towns began to take form. Others received their names directly from the owner or operator of the colliery, such as Wiggan's Patch, two miles west of Mahanoy City, named for George Wiggan.

Another typical example lies in Robinson's Patch about four miles west of Mahanoy City. Morris Robinson had charge of sinking a slope near the Mahanoy Plane and built a small village to house his workers. However, the workers did not own their homes as the ownership of the dwellings passed on with the ownership of the colliery.¹⁴

Other patch towns surrounding Mahanoy City receiving their names from the colliery owners included Hills Terrace, a half mile north of Mahanoy City, named for the Hill-Harris colliery working there. Bowman's patch, a half mile northeast of the borough got its name from the J. & O. Bowman colliery. As more collieries opened around Mahanoy City, more patch towns were established, many of which achieved a population of several hundred.

¹³United States, Bureau of Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States (Washington, D. C., 1913): 596-601.

¹⁴Zerbey, History of Pottsville and Schuylkill County, II: 575.

The United States Census of 1880 reported the populations of some of these patch towns. Boston Run, two miles west of the borough had 359 residents, Bowmans had 238, Suffolk claimed 398, and Coles patch on the western limit of Mahanoy City had 260 people in 1880. Lannigans patch had 487 residents, and Robinsons patch claimed 168. The largest patch town in the eastern portion of the Mahanoy basin was Yatesville lying northwest of Mahanoy City, directly between Mahanoy City and Shenandoah, having a population of 708 people by 1880.¹⁵

Another type of patch town found in northern Schuylkill County was the patch town that grew up around railroad repair shops as opposed to a colliery. The prime example of this is the village of Delano, located about three miles northeast of Mahanoy City. Delano had its beginning when the Mahanoy division of the Lehigh Valley Railroad located its repair shops there in 1865. All the land in and around Delano was owned by the Delano Land Company and leased by the Lehigh Valley Railroad.¹⁶

Delano was strictly a railroad town where all the houses were owned by the railroad company. It differed from most patch towns in that it had more independence. The residents of Delano were better trained and educated, having a more variable choice of labor than the people of the patch towns working in the mines. The building and repairing of engines and the repairing and replacing of passenger cars provided healthier and more pleasant working conditions.

Proof of Delano's industriousness can be seen in its growth from a

¹⁵Pennsylvania, Legislative Documents 1881/82 (Harrisburg, 1882), IV: 240.

¹⁶Munsell, History of Schuylkill County: 345.

railroad village in 1866 to an independent township in 1882. In its earliest years, Delano was part of the farm-oriented Rush Township. As Delano grew in industry and population, it became more involved in disputes with the farmers in the eastern section of the township. One of the main points of contention arose over the length of the school year provided by Rush Township. The people of Delano wanted more education and a longer school year than the farmers thought necessary. This conflict over education proved to be the major factor in the incorporation of part of Rush Township into the new and independent township of Delano in 1882.¹⁷

Mahanoy City served as the urban center for the patch towns. As the borough grew in size, it offered a broad range of municipal services and diversified businesses to the people of the patch towns. The mining industry provided the foundation for the development of non-mining businesses as well as more related enterprises.

This foundation was first laid in the early 1860s when collieries began operations in and around the borough. On the northern limits of the town Edward S. Silliman opened his colliery in 1861, followed by the Primrose, Copley, Suffolk and North Mahanoy. To the west of the borough the St. Nicholas, Tunnel Ridge, Bear Run, and Knickerbocker collieries began mining operations and in 1864 the New Boston colliery opened one mile south of Mahanoy City.¹⁸

Prior to 1860, coal production from the Mahanoy basin was small.

¹⁷Zerbey, History of Pottsville and Schuylkill County, I: 478-482.

¹⁸Pennsylvania, Legislative Documents 1870 (Harrisburg, 1871), I: 946-1023.

The coal statistics available from the Miners Journal cite nine collieries operating in the northern Schuylkill region embracing the entire Mahanoy basin from Delano to Girardville, in 1859. The total production of these collieries that year totaled 361,101 tons.¹⁹ Tonnage increased in 1860 along with the number of collieries when fourteen collieries mined a total of 523,023 tons.²⁰ Production dropped in 1861 to 171,432 tons²¹ but reached a record amount of 577,893 tons in 1862.²²

By 1863 coal production almost doubles the 1862 figure when twenty-six collieries mined 1,025,613 tons of anthracite.²³ The following year thirty-two collieries in the Mahanoy basin mined 1,425,068 tons of coal, for the largest total to that time.²⁴

In 1863 the Mahanoy basin had nine collieries producing over 50,000 tons of coal apiece, three of which mined over 100,000 tons.²⁵ Just one year later the same region boasted of fourteen collieries producing over the 50,000 ton figure, four of which exceeded 100,000 tons each.²⁶

¹⁹Miners Journal, Pottsville, January 14, 1860.

²⁰Ibid., January 12, 1861.

²¹Ibid., January 11, 1862.

²²Ibid., January 23, 1863.

²³Ibid., January 23, 1864.

²⁴Ibid., January 21, 1865.

²⁵Ibid., January 23, 1864

²⁶Ibid., January 21, 1865.

The Mahanoy coal trade boomed from 1860 to 1864, and along with the rise in production came a rise in population and houses. A report in the Miners Journal printed in April of 1862 states, "Mahanoy City, this county, contains now about two-hundred houses. A year since there were only half that many."²⁷

Having a steady population growth and a prosperous economic future, Mahanoy City by 1864 began to look like a town instead of just a collection of houses. The streets became wider and more definite and a central business district began to take shape. About this time the early leadership circles began to organize. Leadership in Mahanoy City was derived principally from two sources. One source, the businessman, did not immediately begin but had to wait for the establishment of large commercial interests and supporting businesses. The other source of civic leadership, the industrialist, was there from the very beginning.

Many of the early coal operators of Mahanoy City emerged as community spokesmen and leaders as soon as the demand existed. Edward S. Silliman, Sr., emerged as the dominant leader of Mahanoy City during these early years and formed important business, political, and civic relationships with the other town leaders.

Silliman, born in 1820 in Berks County, came to the Mahanoy Valley in 1861, sinking the first shaft and building the first breaker in the valley. Silliman was very active in all phases of Mahanoy City life until his death in 1904. Among his many accomplishments, he organized the Mahanoy City Water Company and was president and one of the incorporators of the Mahanoy City Electric Light, Heat and Power Company.

²⁷Ibid., April 19, 1862.

He also organized the Silliman Guards, a regiment of the Pennsylvania National Guard, and effected the organization of the First National Bank of Mahanoy City.²⁸

Silliman's son, Edward S. Silliman, Jr., was born in Mahanoy City in 1864 and followed in his father's footsteps as he aided in the establishment of the water company and the light, heat, and power company. Edward Silliman, Jr., also succeeded his father as president of the First National Bank of Mahanoy City and became owner of the Mahanoy City Water Company.²⁹

George F. Wiggan, an original charter petitioner, was prominently connected with the development of the Mahanoy coal field, building a colliery and a village, Wiggan's Patch, west of Mahanoy City. Wiggan was active in borough politics serving as a councilman and president of that body in 1865. He was associated with the gas company as treasurer and served as school board president in 1867.³⁰

One need only look at the early town councils in Mahanoy City to see the importance and prominence of the coal operators. The newly elected five-man council in 1865 consisted of four coal operators namely Silliman, Hill, Bowman and Wiggan, who was president.³¹

John Eichman, the first chief burgess of Mahanoy City, proved to

²⁸Adolf Schalck, History of Schuylkill County (Harrisburg, 1907), II: 449-50.

²⁹F. W. Beers, et. al., Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania, Geneology-Family History-Biography (Chicago, 1916): 70

³⁰Tri-Weekly Record, Mahanoy City, June 6, 1891

³¹Mahanoy City, Borough Council, Minutes of the Borough Meetings, February, 1865, MS, Borough Hall, Mahanoy City.

be one of the most notable citizens in early Mahanoy City. Eichman served as chief burgess in 1864 and six times thereafter. Eichman was closely aligned with Edward S. Silliman, serving as superintendent and collector for the Mahanoy City Water Company, which Silliman controlled. Eichman, in addition to being chief burgess, served as borough tax collector and school tax collector.³²

William L. Yoder, born near Orwigsburg in 1830, contributed his financial knowledge to the development of Mahanoy City. He was the first cashier of Silliman's First National Bank of Mahanoy City. He was one of the organizers of the Mahanoy City Gas Company as well as the Light, Heat and Power Company, serving as treasurer of both. In addition to these, he served as a director and treasurer of the Serial Building and Loan Association. Yoder served on the school board in various capacities and exhibited a great interest in education. Yoder, like Edward Silliman, was a prominent member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and he served for many years as the superintendent of the church's Sunday school.³³

Finally, Frank Wenrich, a butcher, became very active in civic leadership after coming to Mahanoy City. Although he was not as prominent as Silliman, Wiggan, or Yoder, he became a highly respected public servant. Wenrich was elected chief burgess in 1872 and had several terms as a councilman, presiding over council in 1879. Wenrich was also the first lieutenant of the Silliman Guards in 1875.³⁴

³²Munsell, History of Schuylkill County, 229.

³³Herry W. Ruoff and Samuel T. Wilev, Biographical and Portrait Cyclopedia of Schuylkill County (Philadelphia, 1893): 176.

³⁴Munsell, History of Schuylkill County, 374.

This small circle of leaders emerged in Mahanoy City in the early 1860s and dominated much of the early policies of the new borough. They were all civic minded men who served and guided the borough through its growing years, sharing positions of great responsibility on the borough councils, municipal services, and school boards.

Cooperation among these men is evident in looking at the activities they were involved in together. For example, when William Yoder had to be bonded as borough treasurer in 1870, Edward S. Silliman served as his security as he did several times afterwards.³⁵ In 1879 when John Eichman became borough treasurer, Silliman and Wenrich provided the necessary securities.³⁶

During the latter part of the 1870s the name of Charles D. Kaier began to appear as an active, leading citizen of Mahanoy City and retained this position during the rest of the nineteenth century. Born in Baden, Germany, in 1839, he arrived in Mahanoy City in 1862, where he opened a liquor business with his partner, Frederick Ganlert. Beginning with this small partnership, Kaier developed it into a large and famous brewery, having an annual production of over 100,000 barrels of beer and ale. In connection with his brewery, Kaier founded the Broad Mountain Ice Company and controlled the Anthracite Light, Heat and Power Company.³⁷

Kaier, a world traveler, loved culture as demonstrated by his construction of a large and beautiful opera house on North Main Street

³⁵Mahanoy City, Borough Council, Minutes of the Borough Meetings, March 4, 1870, MS, Borough Hall, Mahanoy City.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Beers, et.al., Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania, 70.

in Mahanoy City. He was connected with several banks, not only in Mahanoy City where he served as president of the Union National Bank, but also in the neighboring towns of Shenandoah and Girardville. Kaier represented an opposite religion and political philosophy with regard to the other borough leaders.³⁸

Civic leaders such as Silliman, Wiggan, and Yoder were all religiously Protestant and politically Republican as opposed to Kaier's German Catholic and Democratic beliefs. Kaier, who died in 1899, supported and led the Democratic party in Mahanoy City until his death.³⁹

Politics in nineteenth-century Mahanoy City was divided into two distinct camps, each controlled by a distinct leader. The Republican party was controlled by Edward S. Silliman while the Democrats looked to Charles D. Kaier for leadership. The development of politics in Mahanoy City and particularly the roles played by Silliman and Kaier will be discussed in greater detail later preceding the development of municipal government in Mahanoy City.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

CHAPTER II

Mahanoy City and the Development of Mining in the Middle Western Field: 1865 to 1900

Among the most reliable indicators of the growth of a community can be found by measuring increases in population and economic activity. From 1865 to 1900, Mahanoy City grew from a small village of five-hundred people to a small city of over thirteen thousand residents.¹ This large population increase over a thirty-five year period can be attributed to the bountiful employment opportunities available in the anthracite coal fields of Pennsylvania. Coal mining, by far the major occupation of the Mahanoy area, can by careful study, be used to illustrate the growth of Mahanoy City as an urban center.

By the spring of 1866, Mahanoy City showed signs of a prosperous future. The Pottsville Miners Journal reported that "many new buildings are being erected in that town. The place will yet rival Pottsville in size, if projected improvements are carried out."²

The influx of population into Mahanoy City and the surrounding patch towns was greatly aided by the opening of the entire basin to transportation. The first successful railroad penetration into the

¹United States, Bureau of Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States (Washington, D. C., 1913): 596-601.

²Miners Journal, Pottsville, March 17, 1866.

Mahanoy basin came in 1854 at Ashland by the Mine Hill and Schuylkill Haven Railroad.³ In the same year the East Mahanoy Railroad became incorporated and was constructed westward from Tamaqua to a point four miles east of Mahanoy City and eventually into the borough.⁴

Another principal line, the Lehigh and Mahanoy branch of the Lehigh Valley Railroad, entered the basin westward from Delano, through to New Boston and eventually into Frackville and Mt. Carmel. A fourth railroad system, the Mahanoy and Broad Mountain Railroad made connections at Big Mine Run, east of Ashland and at Locust Dale. This last railroad line, chartered March 29, 1859, also had the privilege of making lateral roads into the Shenandoah, Mahanoy and New Boston coal reserves.⁵

By 1860 these four railroads successfully united the Mahanoy basin from its eastern end at Buck Mountain to the western limits at Ashland. Two other major railroad related events deserve discussion in the opening of the Mahanoy basin. These two engineering feats are the Mahanoy Plane and the East Mahanoy Railroad Tunnel.

The building of the Mahanoy Plane in 1861 from the western end of the village of Gilberton, situated three miles west of Mahanoy City along the banks of the Mahanoy Creek, to the top of the Broad Mountain aided coal production in the Mahanoy basin. Coal shipments soon increased over the plane, attracting many speculators to the area. Railroad repair shops and engine houses were built by the Philadelphia

³W. W. Munsell, History of Schuylkill County (New York, 1881): 40.

⁴Adolf Schalck, History of Schuylkill County (Harrisburg, 1907), II: 122.

⁵Ibid.

and Reading Railroad which made its headquarters at the top of the plane in Frackville.⁶

The plane had a pitch of twenty-eight degrees at its steepest point and rose 524 feet from its base to its top. The overall length of the plane was 2,460 feet. Once in operation, the plane used 2,500 horsepower engines and later replaced them with 6,000 horsepower engines in 1886. The fuel used in the operation of the plane consisted of 125 tons of coal plus 150,000 gallons of water each working day.⁷

The main purpose of the building of the plane on the northern slope of the Broad Mountain was to connect the Mill Creek Railroad with the Mahanoy and Shamokin Branch of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad at Frackville.⁸ The importance of the plane can be understood not only from the above mentioned statistics but also in that it gave use to two new boroughs in the north Schuylkill area.

The top of the plane grew into the borough of Frackville and the bottom of the plane provided the basis for the development of the large western ward of Gilberton referred to as Mahanoy Plane. This western ward of Gilberton is commonly called the "foot" by local residents because of its position at the bottom or the foot of the Mahanoy Plane.⁹ Even today, although the plane has disappeared, residents of the north Schuylkill area retain the term "foot" for the western ward of Gilberton.

⁶Munsell, History of Schuylkill County: 374.

⁷Joseph Henry Zerbey, ed., History of Pottsville and Schuylkill County (Pottsville, 1935), II: 576-577.

⁸Henry W. Ruoff and Samuel T. Wiley, Biographical and Portrait Cyclopedia of Schuylkill County (Philadelphia, 1893): 176.

⁹Ibid.

The last major development prior to the opening of the Mahanoy basin was the completion of the East Mahanoy Railroad Tunnel from the Hosensock Valley, two miles east of Mahanoy City, westward into the Mahanoy coal basin. Work on the tunnel began in 1859 by two brothers who were to play prominent roles in the early history of Mahanoy City, Michael and Patrick J. Barry along with their company began digging the tunnel through this section of Broad Mountain which forms the eastern boundary of the Mahanoy coal basin. The tunnel was completed May 12, 1862, taking a little more than three years to finish. The total length of the tunnel was 3,400 feet, and it connected the Mahanoy basin to the Hosensock Valley and eastward down to Tamaqua.¹⁰ The Mahanoy basin now had a railroad link to the east as well as to the western regions.

With the completion of the transportation network in the Mahanoy basin the population of Mahanoy City began expanding. Population statistics were first recorded separately for Mahanoy City and the township surrounding it in 1870. From 1870 to 1880 the number of borough residents increased from 5,533 to 7,181, an increase of 1,648 people or 29.8 percent, and from 1880 to 1890 the town achieved a remarkable gain of 4,105 people for a 57.2 percent increase in population.¹¹ This 57.2 percent increase represented the greatest growth rate ever achieved by Mahanoy City. In 1900 Mahanoy City contained 13,504 resi-

¹⁰Miners Journal, Pottsville, May 17, 1862.

¹¹United States, Bureau of Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States (Washington, D. C., 1913): 931.

dents and grew to a peak population of 15,936 by 1910.¹² In this sixty year period from 1910 to 1970 the population of the borough continually declined, as did mining activity. As the collieries began closing, the people began leaving Mahanoy City. By 1970 the borough had only 7,345 residents, representing a decrease of over fifty percent in that sixty year period.¹³

The coal mining industry provided the backbone for the development of Mahanoy City, and in return the population of the borough provided the miners to support and strengthen the industry. The mines in and around Mahanoy City in 1869 had capacities of sixty to eighty cars of coal a day. The St. Nicholas colliery alone, working two miles west of Mahanoy City out of a slope one-hundred and twenty-two yards deep, had a capacity of eighty cars per day and used six engines with a total of two-hundred and seventy-six horsepower¹⁴ to ship 82,691 tons of coal to market in 1869.¹⁵ The Tunnel Ridge colliery operated by George W. Cole on the western limits of Mahanoy City filled one-hundred cars a day by using five engines with a total of two-hundred and thirty-five horsepower to ship 60,693 tons to market in 1869.¹⁶

Mahanoy City's most prominent businessman, Edward S. Silliman,

¹²United States, Bureau of Census, U. S. Census of Population: 1950, I, Number of Inhabitants, (Washington, D. C., 1952): 12-38.

¹³United States, Bureau of Census, Census of Population: 1970, General Social and Economic Characteristics, (Washington, D. C., 1972): PC (1) - C40.

¹⁴Pennsylvania, Legislative Documents 1869 (Harrisburg, 1870): 945-946.

¹⁵Miners Journal, Pottsville, January 29, 1870.

¹⁶Ibid.

was working his colliery on the northern limits of the borough in 1869. His colliery consisted of six drift gangways, all running west and above water level. Due to mining above water level, the Silliman colliery used only one fifty horsepower engine¹⁷ but still managed to ship 84,944 tons of coal to market in 1869.¹⁸

By 1872 there were twenty-four collieries working in Mahanoy City or very close to the borough limits which employed a total of 3,990 people,¹⁹ most of whom lived either in Mahanoy City or on the immediate outskirts of the town. It is impossible to establish how many of the 3,990 people actually resided within the borough limits, but a valid conclusion still can be ventured. That conclusion is that most of the employed men of Mahanoy City worked in the mines.

Taking the eleven collieries actually located in Mahanoy City or within one-quarter mile of the town's boundaries in 1872, a combined employment figure of 1,554 is reached.²⁰ This figure of 1,554 is roughly 28 percent of the town's total 1870 population figure of 5,553.²¹ Taking into consideration the number of women, children and unemployed men of the borough which were included in the 5,553 figure, this 28 percent mark becomes a very large and significant percentage.

Using the same system for the years 1880, 1890, and 1900, that is, using only the collieries located either in the town or within one-

¹⁷Pennsylvania, Legislative Documents 1869 (Harrisburg, 1870): 996-997.

¹⁸Miners Journal, Pottsville, January 29, 1870.

¹⁹Pennsylvania, Legislative Documents 1873 (Harrisburg, 1874), III: 1414-1415.

²⁰Ibid.

quarter mile of Mahanoy City, similar results are derived. In 1880, the twelve collieries of Mahanoy City employed a total of 2,927 men,²² 40 percent of the total 1880 borough population.²³ In 1890, fourteen collieries in or near Mahanoy City employed 6,984 men,²⁴ 62 percent of the town's population.²⁵ Finally in 1900, eleven collieries in or within one-quarter mile of the borough employed 6,054 people²⁶ which amounted to 44 percent of the total population of Mahanoy City.²⁷

Two considerations must be kept in mind in judging these statistics. First, obviously these employment figures included many men who commuted miles to work in Mahanoy City collieries. The increased availability of reliable transportation by 1880 encouraged this fact. Second, the opposite is also true. The availability of transportation also encouraged the workers residing in the borough to travel several miles to collieries and work. In fact, the five largest collieries of the eastern Mahanoy basin, the Knickerbocker, Ellangowan, Gilberton, St. Nicholas, and Maple Hill collieries, were not counted in the previous employment figures. Therefore, by considering both sides of the

²²Pennsylvania, Legislative Documents 1880/81 (Harrisburg, 1891), IV: 25-26.

²³United States, Bureau of Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States (Washington, D. C., 1913): 931.

²⁴Pennsylvania, Official Documents 1890 (Harrisburg, 1891), III: 219-220.

²⁵United States, Bureau of Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States (Washington, D. C., 1913): 931.

²⁶Pennsylvania, Official Documents 1900 (Harrisburg, 1901), VI: 220-221.

²⁷United States, Bureau of Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States (Washington, D. C., 1913): 931.

commuting factor to be equal, the large mine employment figures for Mahanoy City show that the great majority of Mahanoy City residents who were working, were working in the mines. In addition, there were no railroad yards in Mahanoy City in the nineteenth century. This fact serves to increase the validity of the statement that Mahanoy City was a mining town as well as an urban center.

On April 5, 1870, an act was passed by the Pennsylvania legislature calling for inspection of all coal mines and the preservation of records. John Eltringham was appointed the first inspector of all the coal mines in the Second or Ashland district, comprising all the collieries north of the Broad Mountain in the Mahanoy Valley and all collieries in Columbia County.²⁸ The passage of this act made it mandatory for collieries to report production statistics, deaths, accidents and other important information to the state mine inspector. Also, the operators had to provide maps of their mining operations and aid in the inspections of their mines.

From 1870 to 1900 the inspection districts were changed four times. The original 1870 boundaries were changed in 1875, 1885, and finally in 1891. Each time, the new districts became smaller in area while each of the revised districts increased coal production.

In Eltringham's reports from 1870 to 1874 the number of collieries in the Second or Ashland district remains consistently above sixty-eight in number.²⁹ Coal production for the five year period reached a zenith

²⁸Pennsylvania, Legislative Documents 1871 (Harrisburg, 1872): 1739.

²⁹Ibid.

in 1871 when the district's sixty mine collieries produced a combined total of 3,449,000 tons of anthracite.³⁰

The Edward S. Silliman breaker of Mahanoy City is singled out in Eltringham's 1871 report, "The machinery is so arranged as that the coal when hoisted out of the mine, is at once delivered into the breaker--an exceedingly advantageous arrangement."³¹ Such efficiency was rare in the early anthracite mines. Much of the coal was wasted, along with many lives, because of carelessness. Ideally, a well-designed breaker separated dirt and fine coal before it reached the main screens, all slate had been picked before the coal went on the rollers, and only that coal which required breaking went through. Quite frequently all the coal was run through the crushers causing a great deal of waste.³²

On September 22, 1875, the term of John Eltringham expired, and the district of Shenandoah was created, embracing all the coal mines situated north of the Broad Mountain in Schuylkill County and lying east of the eastern limits of the town of Girardville.³³ By the division, the Mahanoy basin was divided into two separate districts with Mt. Carmel, Ashland, and Girardville in the new western district and Mahanoy City and Shenandoah in the new eastern district of the Mahanoy basin.

Samuel Gay, a thirty-seven year old native of Bristol, England, was appointed mine inspector for the newly formed Shenandoah District in

³⁰Ibid. (1872), II: 873.

³¹Ibid. (1871), II: 1025.

³²C. K. Yearly, Enterprise and Anthracite (Baltimore, 1961): 116-117.

³³Pennsylvania, Legislative Documents 1875 (Harrisburg, 1876), II: 1018.

1875. Gay came to the United States in 1857 settling in St. Clair before moving to Shenandoah in 1864 to become superintendent of the Stanton colliery at Mahanoy Plane. He remained inspector of the Shenandoah district from 1875 to 1880,³⁴ when Robert Mauchline replaced Gay as mine inspector.³⁵

Between 1875 and 1884 two major developments occurred in the Second or Shenandoah district. First, the number of collieries increased from thirty-six in 1875 to fifty-seven in 1876, keeping in mind the smaller dimensions of the Shenandoah district. Secondly, the monopolization of the Mahanoy basin by the Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company (P. & R. C. & I. Co.) began in the early 1870s.

The great increase in collieries from 1875 to 1876 can be explained in part by the strike which affected the coal industry in 1875. The so-called Long Strike of 1875 lasted from December, 1874, to June of 1875.³⁶ By January of the next year the anthracite industry was once again growing, and the number of collieries rose to fifty-seven, one year after the strike ended. Employment figures for the district from 1875 to 1884 remained consistently above 10,000, rising to a record mark of 14,884 in 1884.³⁷

The Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company owned or

³⁴Pennsylvania, Bureau of Mines, Mine Inspectors Reports 1880 (Harrisburg, 1881): 1.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Munsell, History of Schuylkill County: 69.

³⁷Pennsylvania, Bureau of Mines, Mine Inspectors Reports 1884 (Harrisburg, 1885): 23-24.

operated fifteen of the district's thirty-six collieries in 1875.³⁸ The number of P. & R. C. & I. Co. collieries increased steadily from 1875 to 1884. In 1884 the P. & R. C. & I. Co. owned twenty-six of the district's fifty-four collieries.³⁹ As time elapsed the P. & R. C. & I. Co. not only owned the largest single amount of collieries in the district but also the largest coal producing collieries.

Mauchline's final four reports from 1881 to 1884 are significant because of four major developments which occurred. The annual production figure is consistently above the 4,000,000 ton mark, the number of employees rise by over one-thousand men each year, there are three collieries operating above the 200,000 ton mark each, and for the first time in the district a colliery reaches an annual production figure in excess of 300,000 tons.⁴⁰ The first colliery to reach this production figure was the Ellangowan colliery at Maple Dale, two miles west of Mahanoy City, operated by the P. & R. C. & I. Co. in 1883, when it mined 302,590 tons of coal.⁴¹

The anthracite industry boomed as employment and production continually rose throughout the 1870s and 1880s. The Second or Shenandoah district exemplified this boom. Samuel Gay in his 1879 report remarked upon the great productivity of the district:

³⁸Pennsylvania, Legislative Documents 1876 (Harrisburg, 1877), II: 1023.

³⁹Pennsylvania, Bureau of Mines, Mine Inspectors Reports 1884 (Harrisburg, 1885): 23-26.

⁴⁰Ibid., (1883): 23-58.

⁴¹Ibid.: 55.

The district selected comprises the greater part of the Mahanoy and Shenandoah basins, extending from the Mahanoy tunnel on the east to Girardville on the west, a distance or length of eight miles and having a mean breadth of two miles, an area of sixteen square miles or 1/29 of the total area of the anthracite coal fields of Pennsylvania, and without doubt contained the most productive measures of moderate depth and easy access of any territory of the same area yet discovered. I venture to say that there is not another mining district of equal area in the world that produces so large an amount of coal.⁴²

Both Mahanoy City and Shenandoah developed in the area Gay praised in his report. Both boroughs developed a full range of municipal services and government. Each served as an urban center for the outlying patch towns and villages. There was not a great deal of urban rivalry between Shenandoah and Mahanoy City in their early years primarily due to the fact that there was enough coal and mines for each to prosper independently.

From 1885 to 1890 coal production in the Mahanoy basin was consistently over 4,300,000 tons each year and employment averaged over 15,000 workers annually. Mahanoy City was surrounded by several large collieries, the largest being the Ellangowan colliery at Maple Dale, two miles west of Mahanoy City. This colliery owned by the P. & R. C. & I. Co. produced an astounding 405,603 tons of coal in 1886.⁴³ As Mahanoy City and the surrounding coal industry grew in size, the basin received increased attention from the Pennsylvania Bureau of Mines. In 1885, William Stein was appointed the new mine inspector for the Second or

⁴²Ibid., (1879): 22.

⁴³Pennsylvania, Official Documents 1886/87 (Harrisburg, 1887), III: 155a-157a.

Shenandoah district which was then given the new name of the Fifth Anthracite District of Pennsylvania.⁴⁴

Coal mining served as the chief source of urban growth for Mahanoy City. In 1886 the Fifth Anthracite District produced its record production of 4,972,502 tons of coal.⁴⁵ That same year the tax assessment for Mahanoy City amounted to \$1,437,215.00 which represented the aggregate value of all taxable property for county purposes at the rate of seven mills on the dollar.⁴⁶ Mahanoy City at this time claimed title to having the third highest property value in Schuylkill County. In addition, Mahanoy Township, which surrounded the borough was sited as the wealthiest township in the entire county.⁴⁷ It is clearly evident from these facts that Mahanoy City and the immediate surrounding area was located in one of the most economically profitable spots in nineteenth-century Schuylkill County.

As coal production and employment increased in the Mahanoy basin so did the problems of health and safety. One major result of this problem came in the form of a new and comprehensive mine law in 1891. One of the many sections of this 1891 law included the changing and re-naming of the anthracite mine inspection districts. This new piece of legislation designated the land around Mahanoy City as being in the new

⁴⁴Pennsylvania, Legislative Documents 1885/86 (Harrisburg, 1886), II: 186.

⁴⁵Pennsylvania, Official Documents 1886/87 (Harrisburg, 1887), III: 155a-157a.

⁴⁶Ibid.: 232b.

⁴⁷Ibid.

Sixth Anthracite District of Pennsylvania. This new district was comprised of "that part of Schuylkill County lying north of the Broad Mountain and east of the meridian line drawn through the center of the borough of Girardville."⁴⁸

Production of the new Sixth Anthracite District from 1891 to 1900 was consistently over 6,200,000 tons of coal annually. Production reached its zenith of the nineteenth century in 1899. In that year a record number of eighteen collieries surpassed individual totals of 200,000 tons.⁴⁹ The Ellangowan and Maple Hill collieries each produced over 400,000 tons, with the North Mahanoy and Tunnel Ridge collieries producing in excess of 300,000 tons of anthracite. Fourteen other district collieries produced over 200,000 tons each, and thirteen additional collieries individually passed the 100,000 mark in production.⁵⁰

It is most interesting to note the close proximity of the four major collieries of the district to Mahanoy City. The two leading collieries, the Maple Hill and Ellangowan collieries were located less than two miles west of the borough. The North Mahanoy colliery located on the western limits of the borough provided a major source of employment for Mahanoy City residents.

During 1899, the record production year for the Sixth Anthracite District, the Ellangowan colliery employed 1,153 workers and was followed by the Maple Hill works at 985. The North Mahanoy colliery employed 981

⁴⁸Ibid., (1891), IX: 880-881.

⁴⁹Ibid., (1899), IX: 316-326.

⁵⁰Ibid.

people, and the Tunnel Ridge colliery employed 918 workers.⁵¹ Both the North Mahanoy and Tunnel Ridge collieries were by far the major single employer of Mahanoy City residents during the final years of the nineteenth century.

In addition to changing the mine inspection districts, the 1891 mine law called for the creation of a board to be comprised of eight competent miners, three coal operators, two mining engineers of skill, and two mine inspectors to serve as a commission to revise and amend mine and ventilation laws.⁵² It was the purpose of this board to make mining a safer occupation by identifying and eliminating hazardous mining situations.

Article IX of the 1891 mine law carried important provisions dealing with child labor in and around the mines. The law forbid boys under the age of fourteen and females of any age to be employed or permitted in any mine. It also forbid boys under twelve years of age and females of any age from working in the outside structure or workings of any colliery.⁵³

The above provision was important because of the practice of operators, especially in the earlier days of the industry, of employing young children in and around the mines. Mine Inspector John Eltringham in his report of 1869 on Schuylkill County stated that of the 22,084 persons employed in the county, 5,500 were boys of seven to sixteen years

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid., (1891), IX: 879.

⁵³Ibid., 882-884.

of age.⁵⁴ Laws such as the 1891 mine law became important forces in stopping abusive child labor in America.

Regardless of the age of the coal miner, accidents both fatal and non-fatal were a constant factor in underground mining. William Stein in his 1895 inspector's report identified the four major causes of deaths and serious injuries in the mines. Stein stated the following causes of mining accidents: carelessness on the part of the miner in preparing powder blasts, impatience by the miner in waiting for the blasts to explode, the practice of jumping on or off mine cars while in motion, and general carelessness of the miners around hazardous machinery.⁵⁵

Stein places almost all of the blame for accidents on the individual miner, but in studying the long lists of deaths and injuries reported some of the blame can be attached to the companies running the mines. During the final sixteen years of the nineteenth century the two most hazardous firms operating near Mahanoy City were the Lehigh Valley Coal Company and the Lentz, Lilly and Company. Both firms led in total deaths per thousand employees three times between 1885 and 1900. The Lehigh Valley Coal Company led in deaths per thousand employees in 1888 (4.49/1000),⁵⁶ 1895 (5.0/1000),⁵⁷ and in 1897 (5.28/1000).⁵⁸ Lentz,

⁵⁴Pennsylvania, Legislative Documents 1869 (Harrisburg, 1870): 851.

⁵⁵Pennsylvania, Official Documents 1895 (Harrisburg, 1896), VI: 194.

⁵⁶Ibid., (1888/89), VI: 184.

⁵⁷Ibid., (1895), VI: 196.

⁵⁸Ibid., (1897), II: 164-165.

Lilly and Company had an even higher mortality rate per thousand employees. The Lentz, Lilly and Company firm led in 1889 (5.2/1000),⁵⁹ 1890 (7.4/1000),⁶⁰ and in 1898 (6.6/1000).⁶¹

The Mill Creek Coal Company claimed the highest single year mortality rate of the period with 14.8 deaths per thousand workers in 1900, while producing only 31,894 tons per death that same year.⁶² This company operated two collieries less than one mile east of Mahanoy City. In 1900, their worst year, their Vulcan colliery employed 363 persons, mining 169,484 tons, and their Buck Mountain colliery employed 379 persons who mined 181,355 tons.⁶³ These two Mill Creek collieries which employed many Mahanoy City residents accounted for eleven of the sixty-five deaths reported by the district's forty-five collieries in 1900.⁶⁴

The largest firm operating around Mahanoy City and employing borough residents was the P. & R. C. & I. Co. The collieries operated by the P. & R. C. & I. Co. were generally safer in comparison with the smaller companies. The number of tons mined per loss of life in P. & R. C. & I. Co. collieries was usually higher than the other firms. Even during 1896 and 1899 when the P. & R. C. & I. Co. led in deaths per

⁵⁹Ibid., (1889), VI: 187.

⁶⁰Ibid., (1890), III: 211.

⁶¹Ibid., (1898), VI: 174-176.

⁶²Ibid., (1900), VI: 204-205.

⁶³Ibid., 216-219.

⁶⁴Ibid., 217.

thousand employees, the tonnage mined for each death remained fairly high. In 1896 the company mined 72,982 tons per death⁶⁵ and in 1899 it grew to 82,056 tons for each fatality.⁶⁶ Such efficiency and safety prevailed at the P. & R. C. & I. Co. collieries. For example, Mine Inspector William Stein praised the P. & R. C. & I. Co. in his 1888 report stating, "The number of tons of coal produced per life lost from the P. & R. C. & I. Co. collieries far exceeds the other companies or individual firms."⁶⁷

One continuing process throughout the period 1864 to 1900 bears discussion at this time. In this thirty-one year period the P. & R. C. & I. Co. became the dominating force in Schuylkill County coal mining activities. Although the involvement of the P. & R. C. & I. Co. affected the entire county, only the activities of the company pertaining to Mahanoy City and the Mahanoy basin will be discussed here.

The Philadelphia and Reading Railroad, chartered in 1833, confined itself for nearly thirty years exclusively to transportation.⁶⁸ The changing factor came when Franklin B. Gowen became president of the company in 1869.⁶⁹ Gowen led the railroad along a thirty-year route

⁶⁵Ibid., (1896), VI: 192-193.

⁶⁶Ibid., (1899), IX: 290-291.

⁶⁷Ibid., (1888/89), VI: 186.

⁶⁸Eliot Jones, The Anthracite Coal Combinations in the United States With Some Early Developments of the Anthracite Industry (Cambridge, 1914): 28.

⁶⁹Marvin Schlegel, Ruler of the Reading: The Life of Franklin B. Gowen 1836-1884 (Harrisburg, 1947): 18.

which was to see the P. & R. C. & I. Co. become the largest employer in the Schuylkill County coal mines as well as the largest producer and transporter of the county's anthracite.

The Reading began acquiring competing railroad lines in Schuylkill County in the early 1860s. Among the first to come under the auspices of the Reading included the Schuylkill Valley and Mill Creek Railroad, September 1, 1861; Swatara, April 1, 1862; Mt. Carbon, May 16, 1862; Mahanoy and Broad Mountain, July 1, 1862; and the Union Canal also in July of 1862.⁷⁰ In November of 1864, the East Mahanoy Railroad came under sublease of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad,⁷¹ and in 1871 the Mahanoy and Shamokin Railroad Company became merged and consolidated with the Philadelphia and Reading Company.⁷² In the 1877 labor report of the Reading, the Mine Hill and Schuylkill Haven, Little Schuylkill and Port Carbon railroads were listed as being worked or leased by the Reading.⁷³

By 1877 the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad leased three of the four railroad lines in the Mahanoy basin. The three were the Mine Hill and Schuylkill Haven Railroad, the East Mahanoy Railroad, and the Mahanoy and Broad Mountain Railroad. The only remaining line independent of the Philadelphia and Reading was the Lehigh and Mahanoy Railroad Company which was merged into the Lehigh Valley Railroad Company in 1866.⁷⁴

⁷⁰Munsell, History of Schuylkill County: 64.

⁷¹Pennsylvania, Legislative Documents 1864 (Harrisburg, 1865), I: 414.

⁷²Ibid., (1871), I: 91.

⁷³Ibid., (1877), III: 723.

⁷⁴Ibid., (1867), I: 299.

The Lehigh Valley Railroad remained independent from the Reading and installed service in Mahanoy City and throughout the Mahanoy basin.⁷⁵

After Franklin B. Gowen became president of the Reading in 1869, the desire of the railroad to acquire coal lands became his main objective. The Reading wanted to own coal lands but could not do so under its original charter. This dilemma was solved in 1871 when the Reading organized the Laurel Run Improvement Company.⁷⁶ Section 3 of this 1871 Act stated,

The said corporation shall have power to purchase, sell, transport, and mine coal, and to mine and manufacture iron, and for this purpose the said company shall have power to acquire from time to time by purchase, lease, or otherwise, such lands as they may deem expedient... and may construct all necessary buildings and fixtures necessary for the business of mining, and for preparing coal for market, mining, manufacturing iron and the accommodations of persons engaged in their employ.⁷⁷

The name of the Laurel Run Improvement Company soon changed to the Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company, and the Reading Railroad purchased the entire stock of the P. & R. C. & I. Co.⁷⁸ Therefore in 1871 the Reading not only had a near monopoly on the railroad lines but also a clearcut, legal right to begin mining anthracite coal. In its first year of existence the P. & R. C. & I. Co. secured about 70,000 acres of coal lands, and within the course of a few years it acquired 30,000 additional acres, which placed it in possession of approximately one-third of the coal lands in the Anthracite basin.⁷⁹

⁷⁶Pennsylvania, Laws of Pennsylvania 1871 (Harrisburg, 1872): 915-917.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Jones, Anthracite Coal Combinations: 30.

⁷⁹Ibid.

The P. & R. C. & I. Co. began acquiring collieries around Mahanoy City as well as the entire Mahanoy basin. By 1878 the P. & R. C. & I. Co. was operating fourteen collieries and owned the land in ten of those cases. Of the ten collieries that the P. & R. C. & I. Co. both owned and operated, six were located in the suburbs of Mahanoy City. Those six collieries were the Ellangowan, Knickerbocker, Boston Run, Elmwood, Mahanoy City, and North Mahanoy. In addition the P. & R. C. & I. Co. owned the land of the St. Nicholas colliery operated by the St. Nicholas Coal Company, the Bear Run colliery operated by Wiggan & Triebler, the Suffolk colliery operated by the Suffolk Coal Company, and the Tunnel Ridge colliery of George W. Cole.⁸⁰

In 1880, the P. & R. C. & I. Co. owned 65,306 acres of anthracite coal lands or 70 percent of the total coal lands in Schuylkill County.⁸¹ The number of collieries in the eastern end of the Mahanoy basin from 1885 to 1900 varied from 47 in 1885, to 38 in 1889 and back to 44 in 1900. During the same time the P. & R. C. & I. Co. owned between 19 and 21 of those collieries, almost one-half each year. The beginning of the final decade of the nineteenth century finds ten collieries producing over 200,000 tons each. Of the big ten producers of this Fifth Anthracite District, the P. & R. C. & I. Co. owned seven, including the largest producer, the Ellangowan colliery, which mined 416,285 tons in 1890.⁸²

⁸⁰Pennsylvania, Bureau of Mines, Mine Inspectors Reports 1878 (Harrisburg, 1879): 26.

⁸¹Pennsylvania, Legislative Documents 1880/81 (Harrisburg, 1882), IV: 20.

⁸²Pennsylvania, Official Documents 1890 (Harrisburg, 1891), III: 218-220.

Mahanoy City became the railroad center for the eastern Mahanoy basin. Transportation connections could be arranged in Mahanoy City to all local areas as well as to the major cities of northern Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey. A look at the train schedules printed in each edition of the Tri-Weekly Record of Mahanoy City bears witness to the great activity in and around the borough in the early 1890s. The Philadelphia and Reading Railroad alone had trains leaving Mahanoy City for New York via Pottsville and Philadelphia seven times each day and via Tamaqua, three times each day. The same railroad had trains going to Williamsport five times a day, to Sunbury and Lewisburg four times a day, and to Shamokin four times a day, also.⁸³

Local traffic to and from Mahanoy City was heavy every day of the week. Trains of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad departed Mahanoy City seven times for Tamaqua, five for Pottsville, six for Mt. Carmel and Shenandoah and seven times a day for Gilberton and Mahanoy Plane. Trains arrived in Mahanoy City from New York, Philadelphia, Williamsport and local areas in equal numbers as they departed.⁸⁴

Therefore, the Reading Railroad not only controlled the most and the largest collieries around Mahanoy City but was also the major transporter of people and cargo to and from the eastern end of the Mahanoy basin.

The P. & R. C. & I. Co. was by far the largest employer of men in the eastern end of the Mahanoy basin. In 1890 the Reading employed

⁸³Tri-Weekly Record, Mahanoy City, January 3, 1893.

⁸⁴Ibid.

12,364 people with the Lehigh Valley Coal Company a distant second employing 1,582 men.⁸⁵ In 1900 the Reading still reigned as the largest employer with 12,242 men.⁸⁶ The Reading owned four of the five largest collieries in the Sixth Anthracite District in 1900, two of which were in Mahanoy City. The Reading owned the North Mahanoy and the Tunnel Ridge collieries employing a combined total of 1,747 men.⁸⁷ It also owned the Ellangowan and Maple Hill collieries, located about two miles west of Mahanoy City, which employed a combined total of 2,265 men in 1900.⁸⁸

Historians have noted the domination of anthracite railroads over the life of the miners. They have noted that the railroad not only provided employment but also owned the miners' homes and controlled them via the company store. This was certainly the case in the patch towns, but the emergence of urban centers such as Mahanoy City provided a base from which an effective challenge could be made on the power of the railroad. As the process of urbanization advanced, Mahanoy City became more independent and self-sufficient. As diversified industries were created to fill the wide range demands of an urban population, the borough citizens prospered. In Mahanoy City miners owned their own homes and purchased from local realtors. The wide variety of stores and shops located in Mahanoy City during the 1890s increased the purchasers

⁸⁵Pennsylvania, Official Documents 1890 (Harrisburg, 1891), III: 209.

⁸⁶Ibid., (1900), VI: 204-205.

⁸⁷Ibid.: 214-218.

⁸⁸Ibid.

independence. This point can best be seen by studying the following table.

TABLE II

Number of Company Stores in the Eight Anthracite Districts - 1900		
District	Number of Employees Attached	% of Total District Employees
1	4,913	22.82
2	5,909	38.25
3	6,397	37.30
4	9,604	66.13
5	9,468	66.24
6	3,144	15.80
7	7,575	37.19
8	4,609	36.34
	Total 51,601	37.43 Av. %

Source: Peter Roberts, The Anthracite Coal Industry (New York, 1901): 138.

The Sixth Anthracite District had the lowest number of employees and lowest percentage of total district employees attached to company stores in 1900. This Sixth District encompassed the two urban centers of Mahanoy City and Shenandoah. Therefore, the independence of the miners in this district is evident. Having only 15.8 percent of mine employees buying in or attached to company stores, it becomes obvious that the diversified shops and stores provided by urban centers greatly reduced the power of the railroad and mining corporations in the Mahanoy basin.

In addition, the fact that Mahanoy City had two railroads operating in the borough enabled local civic leaders and businessmen to play one railroad against the other, eliminating a monopolistic situation. For example, the most distinguished early leader in Mahanoy City,

Edward S. Silliman, derived his initial power base from his colliery employing about two-hundred men annually.⁸⁹ Silliman's colliery was located near the tracks of the Reading Railroad and the Lehigh Valley Railroad, giving Silliman more freedom of action than operators whose collieries were located solely along the Reading's line.

Having both the Reading and the Lehigh Valley Railroads operating in the borough provided the businessmen with a choice of transportation. The Chas. D. Kaier brewery was located between the Reading tracks and the Lehigh Valley tracks. The brewery, the largest non-mining employer in Mahanoy City, could easily ship on either tracks or on both, giving Kaier a good amount of independence and choice.

It was because of this choice and independence acquired through urban growth that Mahanoy City prospered along with the mines but not in slavery to the railroads. The diversification of industry and business in the borough created the basis for independence. It also created a circle of town leaders to guide Mahanoy City through the nineteenth century. The following chapter will deal with the identification and development of these important businesses and businessmen.

⁸⁹Pennsylvania, Legislative Documents 1872 (Harrisburg, 1873), II: 1025.

CHAPTER III

Mahanoy City and the Development of Urban Economic Leaders

The most notable of the early leaders of Mahanoy City was Edward S. Silliman. Silliman came to the eastern end of the Mahanoy basin in 1861 and sank the first shaft and built the first breaker on land which was to become Mahanoy City.¹ His colliery, one of the most efficient in the basin, employed about two-hundred of the earliest Mahanoy City residents during the 1860s and early 1870s.² Silliman's colliery provided him with two sources of economic power. First, the money Silliman acquired from the colliery enabled him to invest in several early economic ventures. Secondly, Silliman was able to control about two-hundred workers which he employed and could dismiss.

Silliman used his money to organize the Mahanoy City Water Company, the borough Gas Company, and the Electric Light, Heat and Power Company.³ He was also responsible for the establishment of the First National Bank of Mahanoy City in 1864 and financed the Silliman Guards of Mahanoy City, a regiment of the Pennsylvania National Guard.⁴

¹Adolf Schalck, History of Schuylkill County (Harrisburg, 1907), II: 449-450.

²Pennsylvania, Legislative Documents 1872 (Harrisburg, 1873), II: 1025.

³Schalck, History of Schuylkill County: 449-450.

⁴Ibid.

National banks were commercial banks established to promote trade and commerce, and Mahanoy City had such a bank as early as 1864. A large advertisement appeared in the December 31, 1864, issue of the Pottsville Miners Journal announcing the opening of the First National Bank of Mahanoy City. The advertisement declared the new bank as, "Now open for all legitimate banking business, collections solicited for all parts of Schuylkill County."⁵

The bank had an authorized capital of \$200,000, and the directors were Abraham Focht, Edward S. Silliman, Henry Meyer, Frank Carter, William Reagan, David Philips, and Godfrey Laury.⁶ Three of these directors, Silliman, Focht and Carter, were coal operators at the time the bank was incorporated. The incorporation of the First National Bank was important not only because of the obvious financial benefits to the community but also in regard to initial economic leadership. Most notably, Edward S. Silliman, Frank Carter, and the first cashier, William L. Yoder, embarked on their first combined business adventure.

Silliman used the profits from his colliery and the bank to help create three major municipal services. In 1864, the same year the bank was founded, Silliman aided in the construction and organization of the borough's water supply, which he eventually owned.⁷ In 1874 he organized the Mahanoy City Gas Company⁸ and in that same year helped form the

⁵Miners Journal, Pottsville, December 31, 1864.

⁶Ibid.

⁷W. W. Munsell, History of Schuylkill County (New York, 1881): 233.

⁸Ibid.

Fidelity Building and Loan Association of which he was treasurer.⁹ The third municipal service Silliman created was the Mahanoy City Light, Heat and Power Company in 1887, of which he was president.¹⁰

As Silliman led the borough to growth and prosperity through his financial ventures, everyone prospered. Silliman's personal wealth grew as he eventually controlled the water, gas, and light companies. The anthracite coal industry boomed in the 1860s and 1870s attracting more people and Mahanoy City itself prospered. It is ironic that one result of this urban economic growth, much of which is credited to Silliman, also caused the emergence of the only man of sufficient stature and wealth to challenge Silliman's empire in Mahanoy City.

Charles D. Kaier, born in Baden, Germany, in 1839, came to Mahanoy City in 1862 where he opened a liquor business with a partner, Frederick Gantert.¹¹ As the population of Mahanoy City increased from about 500 residents in 1860 to over 13,000 people by 1900, the consumer demands also increased. Most of the employed men of the borough worked in the mines and in doing so created a large market for liquid refreshments, especially beer and ale.

This great demand for beer and ale was answered by the creation of the Chas. D. Kaier Brewery in 1883. Kaier erected a large building on North Main Street in 1883 and enlarged it in 1890.¹² By 1890 the

¹⁰Mahanoy City, Borough Council, Minutes of the Borough Meetings, November 10, 1889, MS, Borough Hall, Mahanoy City.

¹¹F. W. Beers, et.al., Schuylkill County Pennsylvania, Genealogy - Family History - Biography (Chicago, 1916): 165-167.

¹²Ibid.

the Kaier brewery was among the best in eastern Pennsylvania. It was a complete, almost self-sufficient operation. In addition to the actual beer making process, the plant made all of its own wagons and harnesses, had its own cooperage shop, and the largest individual ice plant in the vicinity.¹³

The Kaier brewery was the largest non-mining employer in Mahanoy City. By 1892 the brewery was producing 100,000 barrels annually and employed 150 men.¹⁴ Employment figures doubled by 1899 when the brewery, ice plant, and bottling works of Kaier employed 300 men of whom only two were under twenty-one years of age.¹⁵

Charles D. Kaier became one of the most loved and respected employers in Mahanoy City. Kaier was always deeply concerned with the welfare of his employees and even set up the Kaier Beneficial Association for his employees. When the Spanish-American War began, he notified all of his employees that he would grant them full pay as long as they were in the country's services, in addition to the regular army pay they received.¹⁶

In addition to being an economic benefit for Mahanoy City, the Kaier brewery and its products were a great source of pride for the community. The fine quality of the "old Kaier's beer" is still loudly praised by the older, retired men of the borough. The Kaier family became very prominent in Mahanoy City, and Charles D. Kaier became one

¹⁵Pennsylvania, Official Documents 1899 (Harrisburg, 1900), VI: 534-535.

¹⁶Chas. D. Kaier Company, Golden Anniversary of Chas. D. Kaier Company: n.p.

of the town's leading citizens and businessmen, holding many positions of honor and trust.

As Edward S. Silliman used his colliery as an economic base for financial endeavors, Kaier used his brewery to launch several economic ventures. In connection with the brewery, Kaier founded the Broad Mountain Ice Company in 1899 and controlled the Anthracite Light, Heat and Power Company.¹⁷

One of Kaier's most notable economic adventures occurred in 1889, when he helped establish the Union National Bank of Mahanoy City. Andrew Comrey, a former insurance agent and justice of the peace in Mahanoy City, was the first president and H. K. Smith, also an insurance agent, became the first vice-president. Charles D. Kaier became a director of this bank and succeeded Smith as vice-president.¹⁸ The Union National Bank created rivalries between Kaier and Silliman. Both banks were located in the central business district of the borough. Unlike Silliman whose banking influence was limited to Mahanoy City, Kaier became connected with banks in the neighboring towns of Shenandoah and Girardville, also.¹⁹

In 1890 Kaier became chairman of the board of the Mahanoy City Electric Railway Company chartered that year at a capital stock of \$100,000.²⁰ Kaier aided in the completion of this trolley service until

¹⁷Beers, et.al., Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania: 165-166.

¹⁸Joseph Henry Zerbey, ed., History of Pottsville and Schuylkill County (Pottsville, 1935), III: 1275.

¹⁹Beers, et.al., Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania: 165-166.

²⁰Miners Journal, Pottsville, October 24, 1890.

his death in 1899.²¹ At the time of his death, Kaier was the outstanding citizen of Mahanoy City. Kaier, through his brewery and banking profits, grew into the most beloved town father. His generosity to the town, and his workers in particular, earned for him and his family a great deal of respect and admiration from borough residents.

Apart from Silliman and Kaier, several other men took hand in developing the financial institutions of Mahanoy City. The borough led the Mahanoy basin in the development of financial institutions. In Schuylkill County, with the exception of Pottsville, Tamaqua, Shenandoah, and Mahanoy City, there were no banks in the mining districts during the 1870s and 1880s.²² Boroughs such as Girardville, Frackville, and Gilberton as well as the many patch towns surrounding them did not have any banks. The residents of these boroughs and patch towns relied on Mahanoy City and Shenandoah for financial services in order to mine coal, to invest money, and to build and insure their homes.

The profitable and healthy financial situation of Mahanoy City characterized by its banking institutions was reinforced by the number and size of the many building and loan associations formed in the borough. In October of 1874 two building and loan associations were formed in Mahanoy City. The Scheurman Building and Loan and Funding Association was opened by Carl Scheurman and aided in the financing of homes for German workers. This association prospered, showing \$28,215 net assets in its 1880 audit.²³

²¹Beers, et.al., Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania: 167.

²²Peter Roberts, Anthracite Coal Communities, (New York, 1904): 248-251.

²³Munsell, History of Schuylkill County: 233.

Also in October of 1874, the Fidelity Building and Loan Association opened its doors. A. W. Brown served as president with William B. Wagner as vice-president; T. H. B. Lyon, secretary; I. Y. Sollenberger, solicitor; and Edward S. Silliman as treasurer. This association showed assets in 1880 of \$95,708.69.²⁴ This association served many English and Welsh miners of Mahanoy City. The association prospered, as did all of Silliman's ventures, showing assets of \$231,350.41 in 1895.²⁵

The German population was also served by two other firms which opened in Mahanoy City. In 1876 the German Mahanoy City Building and Loan Association was chartered with a capital stock of \$500,000.²⁶ In 1883 the Washington-German Building and Loan Association was chartered with a capital stock of \$300,000,²⁷ this stock being increased in 1891 to \$1,000,000.²⁸ The Washington-German Building and Loan Association also served many of the Polish and Italian residents of the borough in the 1890s. Other home building and loan associations chartered in nineteenth-century Mahanoy City included the Serial Building and Loan Association (1882)²⁹ and the Home Building and Loan Association (1897).³⁰

Mahanoy City, in addition to banks and building and loan associ-

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Pennsylvania, Official Documents 1895 (Harrisburg, 1896), XI: 1041.

²⁶Pennsylvania, Laws of Pennsylvania 1876 (Harrisburg, 1877): 231.

²⁷Ibid. (1883): 253.

²⁸Ibid. (1891): a147.

²⁹Pennsylvania, Legislative Documents 1898 (Harrisburg, 1899), II: 561.

³⁰Pennsylvania, Laws of Pennsylvania 1897 (Harrisburg, 1898): 463.

ations, had three major fire insurance companies which enabled borough residents to protect themselves against the ever-present danger of fire. The Farmer's and Merchant's Insurance Company, incorporated in 1872, began business in 1874, issuing fire insurance amounting to \$557,698 that year.³¹ The North Schuylkill Mutual Fire Insurance Company of Mahanoy City became the borough's second company of that nature when it was incorporated in 1874.³² Finally, the Stone Valley Mutual Fire Insurance Company of Mahanoy City was organized in February, 1877, and issued \$287,925 in fire insurance that year.³³ Fire insurance was very important in nineteenth-century Mahanoy City. The great majority of houses were made entirely of wood, thereby being very vulnerable to fire. Also, most houses were built in an adjoining manner making row house fires very possible.

Among the several characteristics of a large urban center is the presence of diversified industries in addition to just one major employer. Mahanoy City in order to prosper had to have, in addition to mining, mine-related support industries. The most closely related mine support industry in and around Mahanoy City included the railroad yards and repair shops. Mahanoy City became the major commercial center for the collection of coal in the eastern end of the Mahanoy basin. The geography of the narrow valley prevented the building of any large yards within the borough limits. The town was more than a mile long but never wider than one-half mile at any point. Therefore, the large railroad yards

³¹Pennsylvania, Legislative Documents 1875 (Harrisburg, 1876), II: 422.

³²Ibid. (1876), III: 218.

³³Ibid. (1878/79), III: 226-227.

never located within the borough limits.

However, two miles to the west of Mahanoy City, the Reading Railroad built a large yard for the filling and shipping of railroad cars. The site of this yard, at St. Nicholas, proved beneficial because of its location between the large coal producing colliery centers of Shenandoah, two miles to the north and Mahanoy City, two miles to the east. The major competing railroad of the Reading in Schuylkill County, the Lehigh Valley Railroad, located its shops three miles northeast of Mahanoy City at Delano.

The geography of Mahanoy City, therefore, was not conducive to railroad yards or shops. Both the Reading and the Lehigh Valley Railroads were forced to build outside the town, thereby limiting their employment potential in Mahanoy City. The working residents of the borough, by far, were employed in the mines rather than with the railroads as in Delano and St. Nicholas. This being the case, the power and influence of the railroads in Mahanoy City did not equal that of the mines.

Mahanoy City in the final fifteen years of the nineteenth century had a great deal of basic support industries giving employment to a substantial number of men, women and children. As Mahanoy City grew into an urban center the needs of the people for food, clothing, and shelter was increasingly answered by the borough itself. The process of urbanization became characteristic throughout much of Pennsylvania, and the number of support industries grew in many towns and cities. This process resulted in a deepening concern by the State for the welfare of its citizens employed in urban factories. The increasing concern can be

seen in the creation of the position of factory inspectors for most of the factories and industries of Pennsylvania by 1889.

A major support industry found in Mahanoy City was the business of manufacturing necessary equipment used in and about the mines. However, there was only one large iron foundry in the borough. The Grant Iron Works, located just south of the borough limits, was erected in 1865 by George H. Wren, originally of Pottsville. In 1867, George Wren, Jr., and his partner Ralph R. Lee purchased the foundry from Wren's father and operated it under the firm name of Lee and Wren until 1877. From 1867, the Grant Iron Works was called the Lee and Wren Iron Works and constructed most of the machinery for the collieries near Mahanoy City.³⁴

The Lee and Wren Foundry in 1880 consisted of the machine shops, erecting shops, the smith shop, and an office building. The works were supplied with costly machinery and a valuable assortment of patterns and were capable of turning out a large amount of first class work. The firm at one time employed some sixty hands, but since the Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company became owners of most of the collieries in the vicinity,³⁵ the demand for work from the Lee and Wren Foundry decreased.

The Lee and Wren Works manufactured steam engines and pumps, rolling mills, furnaces, and mining machinery. The retirement of

³⁴Henry W. Ruoff and Samuel T. Wiley, Biographical and Portrait Cyclopaedia at Schuylkill County, (Philadelphia, 1893): 625-626.

³⁵Munsell, History of Schuylkill County: 233-234.

Ralph R. Lee in 1877 and the coinciding rise of the P. & R. C. & I. Co. during the mid-1870s marked the decline of the foundry which employed only eighteen people by 1900.³⁶

In 1889, for the first time, the Official Documents of Pennsylvania contain factory inspection reports. Much of the following information concerning the factories of Mahanoy City was compiled from these reports which, as the Mine Inspector Reports of Pennsylvania, began somewhat incomplete but improved as time passed. The factories of Mahanoy City initially appear in the Factory Inspector's Reports of 1892.

There were two large factories operating in Mahanoy City in the nineteenth century which employed mostly women. The Eagle Hosiery Mill was incorporated May 27, 1889, with a capital stock of \$25,000.³⁷ Under its act of incorporation, the Eagle Hosiery Mill had the power of "erecting a hosiery mill, purchasing machinery and material and manufacturing hosiery and underwear and selling the same when manufactured."³⁸ The founding stock company operated the concern for a few months, and then leased the plant to Charles Chapman and Son from Germantown, Pennsylvania, who conducted the business until 1892. On January 25 of that year the firm of Jones and Johnson leased the building and machinery and operated the business for the remainder of the nineteenth century.³⁹

³⁶Pennsylvania, Official Documents 1900 (Harrisburg, 1901), VI: 534-535.

³⁷Pennsylvania, Laws of Pennsylvania 1889 (Harrisburg, 1890): a141.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Adolf W. Schalck, History of Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania (Harrisburg, 1907), I: 232.

In 1892 the Eagle Hosiery Mill employed 109 females and 6 males; one year later the number rose to 169 females and 6 males⁴¹ and in 1894 the factory employed a record of 176 females and 7 males for a total of 183 persons.⁴² The record number of employees at 183 remained the peak employment figure for the mill in the nineteenth century.

The other major employer of women in Mahanoy City was the shirt manufacturing firm of Bushar and Philips. The employees of this company were first included in the factory reports of 1898. In that year Bushar and Philips employed 75 females, 25 of whom were under 21 years of age.⁴³ The following year the firm's name was changed to H. F. Bushar and employed a total of 93 people, 52 of them being females and 38 of them being girls under 21 years of age.⁴⁴ In 1900, the H. F. Bushar firm attained a record number of employees at 143 people, most of whom were females.⁴⁵

The employment figures of the Eagle Hosiery Mill and the H. F. Bushar firm are not very significant when compared to the large number of employees who worked in the mines. But the importance of these factories lies not in the number employed as much as the types of people employed. While young boys could find employment in the coal mines, the

⁴⁰Pennsylvania, Official Documents 1892 (Harrisburg, 1893), III: F.59.

⁴¹Ibid. (1893), VII: 197.

⁴²Ibid. (1894), VIII: 258.

⁴³Ibid. (1898), VI: 632-633.

⁴⁴Ibid. (1899), VI: 532-533.

⁴⁵Ibid. (1900), III: 590-591.

girls of any age could not do the same work. Therefore, these factories were very important in the development of Mahanoy City, in that the girls found employment in the factories, enabling them to augment the family income. Also, the products of these factories, shirts, pants, etc., could be used to satisfy the local consumer demands, making Mahanoy City a shopping and distributing point for the eastern Mahanoy basin.

In addition to the large employment places, many small shops and businesses flourished in Mahanoy City by the turn of the century providing food, drink, clothing and baking services to name a few. Among the many businesses operating in the borough in 1900 were 135 saloons.⁴⁶ Laundry services included the Crystal Steam Laundry employing 8; the Mahanoy City Steam Laundry, 21; and several smaller laundries employing one or two people.⁴⁷ The largest dry goods store was the D. J. Cleary Store which employed 13 people. The 1900 factory report also mentions that 8 bake shops employed a total of 29 people.⁴⁸

Although these small businesses employed very few people in comparison to the mines, the hosiery mills, or Kaier's brewery, they were still important to the life-style of Mahanoy City. Because of these small stores and shops, Mahanoy City in the 1870s and 1880s became the urban center for the eastern Mahanoy basin. The borough was able to provide many services and advantages not found in the surrounding patch

⁴⁶Roberts, Anthracite Coal Communities: 226.

⁴⁷Pennsylvania, Official Documents 1900 (Harrisburg, 1901): 590-602.

⁴⁸Ibid.

towns or villages. These advantages included municipal services, many and varied employment opportunities, banks, saving and loan associations, dry good stores, and a choice of eating and drinking establishments.

All of these advantages enabled the borough to attract and support a large population and prosper into an urban center. Most importantly these banks and businesses gave the city a life apart from the mines and from the two dominating railroads of the region. Also, the borough's business and financial institutions created two of the most influential leaders of Mahanoy City in Edward S. Silliman and Charles D. Kaier.

CHAPTER IV

Politics and Government in Mahanoy City

Mahanoy City by September of 1863 contained about two-hundred people. The community having a sufficient number of residents petitioned the Grand Jury of the Court of Quarter Sessions of Schuylkill County in Pottsville for a charter of incorporation as a borough. The petition, dated September 10, 1863, requested incorporation under the name of the Borough of Mahanoy City and was signed by seventy-three residents. Among the petitioners were Patrick J. Barry, George F. Wiggan, Frank Wenrich, Emanuel Boyer, Carl Scheurman, and the two most notable signatures of Charles D. Kaier and Edward S. Silliman. The petition was accepted and approved the following day by George F. Weist, Foreman of the Grand Jury of Schuylkill County.¹

The next step towards incorporation was the attainment of an order from the Court of Common Pleas confirming the charter. This step was finalized in a little more than three months from the original date of petition. On December 16, 1863, the Court of Common Pleas confirmed the judgement of the Grand Jury and decreed the town of Mahanoy City be incorporated into a borough in conformity with the petition.²

¹Schuylkill County Court House, Recorder of Deeds Office, Misc. Book IX: 201.

²Ibid.: 203.

The court ordered the first borough election should be held at the public house of Patrick Ryan in Mahanoy City on the third Friday of February. The place of election was a tavern operated by Patrick Ryan on what is now the first block of East Center Street. In accordance with the laws of Pennsylvania, the court provided for the time and place of elections, public announcements of the same, and also named Edward S. Silliman and Michael Barry as inspectors of the elections and Edward Boyer as judge of elections.³

The first borough election, held February 23, 1864, resulted in John Eichman being elected as Chief Burgess and Patrick J. Barry, Thomas Westcott, George F. Wiggan, William Schneitzer, Frank Roth, and Thomas Fitzgerald being elected as the first council of Mahanoy City.⁴ This first borough election is significant not only for its obvious importance in being the first election held in Mahanoy City but even more so because of the men elected. These earliest appointments set the shape and scope of Mahanoy City politics for at least the first fifteen years.

The first borough election resulted in a Republican victory and the next election, held in 1865, resulted in a similar victory for the Republicans and also for the coal operators. In the February, 1865 election Edward S. Silliman was elected to borough council beginning his long, far reaching public career. Serving with Silliman were four coal

³Ibid.

⁴Mahanoy City, Borough Council, Minutes of the Borough Meetings, May 30, 1864, MS, Borough Hall, Mahanoy City.

operators namely, James Bowman, George Wiggan, Thomas Fitzgerald, and Charles Hill.⁵

Silliman became the leader of the Republican Party in Mahanoy City, deriving his initial power base from his colliery. The combination of Silliman's personal wealth and political popularity and power opened up several business opportunities for him. At different times in his life Silliman presided over the Mahanoy City Water Company, Electric Light, Heat and Power Company, and the Gas Company.⁶ Silliman built a large house on North Main Street, one block north of the center of town and he also had an estate near the Mahanoy City water dams, which he owned. Silliman often entertained at this estate during the summer months, using his borough home to entertain his friends during the winter.

Silliman had the money to create these services which helped the town while at the same time, providing these services allowed him to increase his fortune and prestige. Silliman's wealth and prestige enabled him to control a close circle of Republican leaders in early Mahanoy City. Most of Silliman's business and political comrades were Republican in politics and Protestant in religious beliefs.

For example, William L. Yoder, a close friend of Silliman, was a member of the Episcopal Church as was Silliman. Yoder served as cashier of Silliman's First National Bank of Mahanoy City, and helped

⁵Ibid., February 22, 1865.

⁶Adolf W. Schalck, History of Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania (Harrisburg, 1907): 451.

Silliman organize the Mahanoy City Gas Company and the Mahanoy City Light, Heat and Power Company. Yoder served as treasurer for both the gas company and the power company which Silliman controlled.⁷

Another comrade of Silliman was George Wiggan who, like Yoder, served as treasurer of the gas company. Wiggan actively aided in opening the Mahanoy basin to coal mining and built Wiggan's Patch in the process. He served as president of the borough council in 1865 along with councilmen Silliman and Yoder.⁸ These men were very popular in early Mahanoy City as can be seen by looking at the 1867 school board. George Wiggan was president of the board, William L. Yoder was the treasurer and another close friend of Silliman, John Eichman, was tax collector.

Eichman, the first chief burgess of Mahanoy City, served as superintendent and collector for Silliman's water company. Eichman was also borough tax collector and school tax collector.⁹ One more friend of Silliman who must be mentioned was Frank Wenrich, chief burgess of the borough in 1872 and president of borough council in 1879. Wenrich, a butcher by trade, was also borough tax collector in 1865, when Wiggan and Silliman were on council.¹⁰

Frank Wenrich receives a brief mention in Marvin Schlegel's

⁷Henry W. Ruoff and Samuel T. Wiley, Biographical and Portrait Cyclopedia of Schuylkill County (Philadelphia, 1893): 224-225.

⁸Tri-Weekly Record, Mahanoy City, November 30, 1889.

⁹W. W. Munsell, History of Schuylkill County (New York, 1881): 229.

¹⁰Ibid.: 230.

book, Ruler of the Reading: The Life of Franklin B. Gowen, 1836-1889.

In speaking of the murders known as the Wiggan's Massacre, Schlegel states,

Old Mrs. O'Donnell, who had been knocked down in the assault recognized one of the men as Frank Wenrich, her butcher. On a warrant sworn out by her son-in-law Jack Kehoe, Wenrich was arrested. Taken to Pottsville for a hearing, he was immediately released on bail. An enthusiastic crowd met him where he received congratulations all evening.¹¹

This passage was the only reference to the former councilman and chief burgess of Mahanoy City. His name is not mentioned again in Schlegel's book or in other places in connection with the murders.

Silliman used his wealth acquired from early mining operations, the gas company, and water company to extend his power in Mahanoy City. Silliman in 1865 aided in creating Mahanoy City's first newspaper, The Mahanoy City Gazette. Along with George Yost, Frank Carter, and Charles Hill, Silliman financed the paper, founded as an organ for the Republican Party. This newspaper, initially formed to combat threats of a Democratic paper in the borough, was used by Silliman and friends to present their political views.¹²

In 1866, Silliman and men such as former burgess William F. Jones, George Yost, Charles Hill, and Frank and William Carter founded the Mahanoy City Geary Club. This club, named after Pennsylvania Governor John W. Geary, became the most active political club in

¹¹Marvin Schlegel, Ruler of the Reading: The Life of Franklin B. Gowen, 1836-1889 (Harrisburg, 1947): 113.

¹²Munsell, History of Schuylkill County: 231.

Mahanoy City.¹³ This Republican party club remained active throughout the nineteenth century in Mahanoy City.

Silliman in November, 1875, helped to establish the Silliman Guards (Company C 7th P.S.G.). The guards consisted originally of sixty-three men who purchased their own equipment at a total cost of about \$3,000. Edward S. Silliman contributed liberally to this cause. John F. Shoener was the first Captain and Frank Wenrich served as the First Lieutenant.¹⁴ The guards eventually became part of the Pennsylvania National Guard.

The only man to challenge Edward S. Silliman's political influence in nineteenth-century Mahanoy City politics was Charles D. Kaier, owner of the Chas. D. Kaier Brewing Company. Kaier was a Catholic-Democrat, a member of St. Fidelis German Catholic Church in Mahanoy City. Kaier was usually on the opposite side of views where Silliman and his friends were concerned. For instance, Kaier who made his fortune by making and selling beer and ale, was opposed by the Mahanoy City Temperance Society and the Masons, of which George Wiggan was a prominent member.

Judging from actions taken by Silliman and Kaier, these two men were divided on more issues than religious ideals. For example, Kaier served as an incorporator, vice-president, and president of the Union National Bank of Mahanoy City, the only bank to compete with Silliman's

¹³Miners Journal, Pottsville, August 4, 1866.

¹⁴Munsell, History of Schuylkill County: 232.

First National Bank.¹⁵ In return Silliman gave support to Protestant groups, such as the Masons, by allowing those groups to use his bank building for their headquarters.

Silliman owned the water company which supplied all the water for the borough and remained unopposed until 1898 when Kaier established the Broad Mountain Water Company and built his own dam.¹⁶ Kaier's brewery was only about one mile from Silliman's dams, but used his own water for the brewery, which he had to pipe in for about three miles.

Kaier, like Silliman, was a political and economic leader. Kaier's lifestyle resembled Silliman's in most respects. Kaier built his mansion in 1885 at the corner of Eighth and Center Streets and entertained lavishly throughout his life. He was well respected by his employees and was very concerned with beautifying Mahanoy City as evidenced by his building of the Kaier Opera House in 1893. Kaier led the Democrats of Mahanoy City on a long up hill climb throughout the nineteenth century until his death in 1899.¹⁷

Kaier, however, was never able to defeat the Republican Party. Mahanoy City remained a staunch Republican town throughout the nineteenth century. Table III describes the United States presidential elections held in the borough from 1864 to 1900 and the results.

¹⁵F. W. Beers, et. al. Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania, Geneology-Family History - Biography (Chicago, 1916): 167.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

TABLE III

U. S. Presidential Election Returns - Mahanoy City 1864-1900					
Election	Democrat	Votes	Republican	Votes	Winning Party
1864	McClellan	287	Lincoln	247	Democrat
1868	Seymour	399	Grant	446	Republican
1872	Greely	300	Grant	509	Republican
1876	Tilden	493	Hayes	620	Republican
1880	Hancock	402	Garfield	525	Republican
1884	Cleveland	512	Blaine	622	Republican
1888	Cleveland	665	Harrison	883	Republican
1892	Cleveland	424	Harrison	885	Republican
1896	Bryan	1,082	McKinley	1,239	Republican
1900	Bryan	952	McKinley	1,178	Republican

Source: 1864 to 1884: Miners Journal, Pottsville.
1888: The Daily Republican, Pottsville.
1892 to 1900: Pottsville Republican, Pottsville.

Mahanoy City followed the patterns of the United States, voting mostly for Republican presidential candidates from the Civil War to the turn of the century. Mahanoy City, as can be seen from the preceding chart, remained a staunch Republican town in the final half of the century giving a majority of votes to a Democratic presidential candidate only once. This isolated instance occurred in the first presidential election held in the borough when George B. McClellan polled two-hundred and eighty-seven to Abraham Lincoln's total of two-hundred and forty votes.

Even when Democrat Grover Cleveland won the United States presidential race in 1884 against Republican James G. Blaine, Mahanoy City

still voted in favor of the Republican Party. Again in 1892 when Cleveland, the Democrat, defeated Republican Benjamin Harrison, Mahanoy City voted for the Republican candidate by a two to one margin; 885 for Harrison to 424 for Cleveland.

The United States presidential election returns were used here because of the ease of comparison of the two major parties and also in consideration of the excitement usually generated by an election of presidential scope. On the state and local level Mahanoy City usually voted for the Republican candidate. The school board and council most often had Republicans in the majority. For example, in the 1882 local elections, Mahanoy City voted in the entire Republican ticket except for the office of assessor where a Greenback candidate won the election.¹⁸

The majority of the leading citizens in Mahanoy City during the nineteenth century that were elected to office were Republicans. Edward S. Silliman, Frank Carter, William Carter, George H. Wren, and George F. Wiggan were all members of the Republican Party. Charles D. Kaier, the town's foremost Democrat, led that party throughout the nineteenth century. However, the Democratic Party of Mahanoy City did not become equal in power with the Republican Party of the borough until the 1920s and 1930s.

It is important to note that the politics and politicians of Mahanoy City remained internal in nature. The borough did not produce any prominent county or state-wide elected officials. Even Kaier and Silliman confined their careers predominantly to Mahanoy City. The one

¹⁸Miners Journal, Pottsville, February 24, 1882.

exception to be found was Oliver Bechtel. Bechtel was the first school teacher in the borough, and he later went on to become Judge of Schuylkill County Courts.¹⁹

The first elected town council in Mahanoy City was Republican, and the councils remained so for forty years. The earliest councils were guided by the Pennsylvania State Legislature and the laws passed by that body. The State and borough cooperated with each other in organizing the town government and enlarging it when necessary.

On April 8, 1864, the Pennsylvania General Assembly passed Act No. 267 which provided the rules and regulations for the management of the borough. Among its provisions, the act limited the number of councilmen to six duly qualified persons, two to serve for one year, two for two years, and two to serve three years. At the next annual election in Mahanoy City two councilmen were to be elected that year and each year after to serve three year terms.²⁰

Section 3 of the act provided that in case of a tie vote in council, the question should be submitted to the chief burgess, who, in such a case had the deciding vote. But when such a tie did not exist, the burgess had no vote in council. The next section of the act provided that in case of death, removal, or resignation of the chief burgess, or any vacancy in any office, such a vacancy shall be filled by a new election for his term of office, within ten days by the council.²¹

¹⁹Joseph Henry Zerbey, ed. History of Pottsville and Schuylkill County (Pottsville, 1935), III: 1266.

²⁰Pennsylvania, Laws of Pennsylvania 1864 (Harrisburg, 1865): 333.

²¹Ibid.: 333-334.

This 1864 act also empowered council to borrow, on the credit of the borough, money not exceeding \$20,000 and to issue coupon bonds or certificates in sums of not less than \$50 each to pay the debts. To pay for the interest on the bonds, the act authorized the town council to raise money by taxation, provided that such tax did not exceed ten mills.²²

According to the first recorded borough council meeting, May 30, 1864, Patrick J. Barry presided over the body. Council also went into elections for terms of office with the following results: Thomas Westcott and Frank Roth for one year, Thomas Fitzgerald and William Schneitzer for two years, and Patrick J. Barry and George Wiggan for three years.²³

The meetings of council during 1864 concerned itself with several urgent problems. At the June 6 meeting, the members appointed a surveyor, secretary, and a solicitor. A police force of twenty-one part time men was appointed, and council instructed the police committee to purchase a piece of ground to erect a jailhouse.²⁴ Throughout the summer of 1864, police protection for the town residents received priority at the meetings. The salary of the Chief Burgess was set at \$75.00 per year, and numerous bills for police equipment were rapidly approved.²⁵

²²Ibid.: 333.

²³Mahanoy City, Borough Council, Minutes of the Borough Meetings, June 6, 1864, MS, Borough Hall, Mahanoy City.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

Other matters of citizen concern brought to attention at the early meetings included petitions for street paving and the elimination of certain nuisances created by borough residents or businesses.

At the September 27, 1864, meeting of council it was agreed to pay a tax of ten mills in accordance with the maximum allowed by the General Assembly. This money was to go for the payment of interest on the borough bonds.²⁶ Three new councilmen were elected in February of 1865, all of them coal operators. They were Edward S. Silliman, James O. Bowman, and Charles Hill, each of whom were well known as colliery owners and operators in Mahanoy City.²⁷ At the February 22 meeting of council, George F. Wiggan, another coal operator, was elected President of Council.²⁸

In March of 1865, the State Legislature passed an act dividing Mahanoy City into two wards for election purposes. This act divided the borough into a North Ward and South Ward with Center Street as the dividing line.²⁹ One year later the State Legislature changed the wards from the north and south to the east and west wards making Main Street the dividing line.³⁰ In the 1868 United States presidential election votes cast in both wards were close in number, with the east ward casting 430 to 415 votes from the west ward.³¹

²⁶Ibid., September 22, 1864.

²⁷Ibid., February 22, 1865.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Pennsylvania, Laws of Pennsylvania 1865 (Harrisburg, 1866), II: 639.

³⁰Ibid., (1866), I: 403.

³¹Miners Journal, Pottsville, November 7, 1868.

In addition to regulating the election wards in Mahanoy City, the State Legislature passed several acts allowing the borough council to borrow money and issue coupon bonds or certificates of indebtedness. The bonds issued by the borough were valued at not less than \$50 each, payable at the expiration of five years or any shorter period. The rate of interest was not to exceed seven percent per year, paid semi-annually to the holder.³² Many of the residents of Mahanoy City responded to the call for investment in the borough by purchasing bonds.

The most notable of the purchasers are recorded in the council minutes when the bonds matured. At the May 21, 1867, meeting payment to several bondholders was recorded. George W. Cole, operator of the Tunnel Ridge colliery received \$729.75, Edward S. Silliman received \$1,025.00, and coal operators Charles H. Triebles and George Wiggan collected a combined amount of \$3,057.50 for bonds purchased.³³ These four men, all coal operators, represented the largest purchasers, but there were many, many citizens of Mahanoy City who bought bonds on a much smaller basis.

On April 11, 1868, the Pennsylvania Legislature passed another bill empowering the town council of Mahanoy City to raise by taxation such sums of money as may be necessary to pay off the principal and interest of its bonds. It was further provided by the Legislature that the tax should be in the form of a water tax, collected upon the real

³²Pennsylvania, Laws of Pennsylvania 1868 (Harrisburg, 1869), II: 841-842.

³³Mahanoy City, Borough Council, Minutes of the Borough Meetings, May 21, 1867, MS, Borough Hall, Mahanoy City.

estate of the borough. This act also designated the money collected to be used for the building of fire plugs, water connections, and the maintenance of fire apparatus and police organization. Section 2 of the same act authorized to town council to use the money for making, grading, and repairing of streets and alleys in the borough. The last section of this 1868 act empowered the borough tax collector to sell the possessions of delinquent payers or imprison them if no possessions could be found.³⁴

Valentine Benner, a local cafe proprietor, was appointed the first tax collector in Mahanoy City at the October 19, 1864, meeting of council and was required to post a five-thousand dollar bond.³⁵ Benner was succeeded by Frank Wenrich in July, 1865, by action of borough council.³⁶

The growing borough of Mahanoy City received additional aid and guidance from the State Legislature by acts passed in April, 1869, and March of 1871. The 1869 act enabled the qualified electors of the borough to elect one person by ballot to serve as supervisor. He was to be salaried by council and was to be in charge of the borough streets, keeping them in proper condition.³⁷

In March of 1871 the State Legislature passed another act

³⁴Pennsylvania, Laws of Pennsylvania 1868 (Harrisburg, 1869), II: 841-842.

³⁵Mahanoy City, Borough Council, Minutes of the Borough Meetings, October 19, 1864, MS, Borough Hall, Mahanoy City.

³⁶Ibid., July 6, 1865.

³⁷Pennsylvania, Laws of Pennsylvania 1869 (Harrisburg, 1870), II: 770.

authorizing the town council to borrow on the credit of the borough any sum or sums of money not exceeding \$30,000 and to issue coupon bonds for not less than fifty dollars each. Also, council was empowered by this act to raise by taxation sums necessary to pay off the principal and interest of said bonds.³⁸

The 1860 census of the United States listed the population of Mahanoy Township at 573 people, just ten years later the population of Mahanoy City reached 5,533 people.³⁹ Having this large number of people living together, civic leaders recognized that development of municipal services was a necessity. Such services as police and fire protection and the construction of a healthy water system became the major objectives of borough council.

Police administration is a function closely related to the safety of the public and therefore was one of the first concerns for the Mahanoy City council. At the July 20, 1864, council meeting the police committee was instructed to purchase a piece of ground for a borough jail.⁴⁰ The committee reported back to council on August 1, 1864, they were offered two lots by Frank Carter, land agent for Troutman, Dundass, and Biddle, for five-hundred dollars. This offer was approved by council, with the money coming out of borough taxes, and a jail was constructed on Pine Street one block east of Main Street at a cost of

³⁸Ibid., 1871, I: 148-149.

³⁹United States, Bureau of Census, Ninth Census of the United States (Washington, D. C., 1872), I: 254-255.

⁴⁰Mahanoy City, Borough Council, Minutes of the Borough Meetings, July 20, 1864, MS, Borough Hall, Mahanoy City.

five-hundred dollars. Also at that meeting, the salary of the chief burgess, John Eichman, was set at seventy-five dollars per year.⁴¹

Duties of the Chief Burgess were many and varied. He was held responsible for furnishing a list in February of each year containing thirty-five to forty names of men to serve as part time policemen. Council in February, 1865, passed a motion calling for a five-dollar fine for any able man refusing to serve as a policeman. The chief burgess, responsible to council for his actions, came specifically under the control of the police committee. He was in charge of enforcing the ordinances of the borough. Some of those duties included removing dead animals from the streets, enforcing quarantine restrictions, and seeing that a corpse of a smallpox victim be buried within five hours without public ceremony, as well as enforcing various traffic regulations.⁴²

The council in 1870 fixed market hours for Mahanoy City on every Wednesday and Saturday throughout the year until twelve noon each day, and only on Market, Main, and Mahanoy Streets.⁴³ The chief burgess represented the town in notifying the collieries in or near Mahanoy City of violations such as allowing dirt to wash into streams and other health hazards. The burgess and his staff of policemen were also kept busy enforcing sidewalk and curb regulations on individual property owners in the town.

Another major responsibility of the chief burgess was his very

⁴¹Ibid., August 1, 1864.

⁴²Ibid., February 22, 1865.

⁴³Ibid., December 5, 1870.

important function of casting the deciding vote in tied elections in borough council. For example, in July, 1868, John Eichman and Peter Brocher applied for tax collector which resulted in a tie vote in council. Council called upon Burgess William Jones who voted for Eichman, breaking the deadlock.⁴⁴

Of all the chief burgesses in Mahanoy City during the nineteenth century, the most notable was John Eichman. He came to America in 1847 and to Mahanoy City in 1863 and one year later was elected the first chief burgess of Mahanoy City. Eichman served more terms as chief burgess than any other man, being re-elected in 1865, 1866, 1875, 1876, and 1878. In addition to his police service, Eichman served as borough treasurer from 1879 to 1881 and was superintendent of the Mahanoy City Water Company.⁴⁵

Mahanoy City had its share of growing pains in the 1860s and 1870s. The Pottsville Miners Journal made note of this in December of 1874, under a headline of "Lively Mahanoy." The paper stated, "While the rest of the county is dull and quiet Mahanoy City maintains her recently acquired reputation for lawlessness."⁴⁶ This piece referred to the riots that had been taking place during the past several Saturday nights. The most infamous event, however, occurred on the night of October 30, 1874, when Chief Burgess George Major was shot and killed at a fire on Railroad Street at Center at the stables of Jno. Hersker, Peter

⁴⁴Ibid., July 6, 1868.

⁴⁵Munsell, History of Schuylkill County: 229.

⁴⁶Miners Journal, Pottsville, December 18, 1874.

Otterbach, and Edward F. Smith.⁴⁷

Major, elected burgess in 1874, had in April of that year received a commission as state policeman for the Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company.⁴⁸ During the October 30 fire, an argument broke out between William Major, brother of the burgess and a member of the Citizens Fire Company, and an Irishman named Sullivan of the Humane Company. During this confusion arising over the fight George Major was shot and killed. An Irishman named Daniel Dougherty was arrested, tried, and acquitted.⁴⁹ No one else was ever brought to trial, and the murderer was never found. George Major served as foreman of the Citizens Fire Company. The Pottsville Miners Journal stated, "It is the public belief that the purpose of the fire was to get up a fight between the two fire companies and in the consequent confusion assassinate Chief Burgess Major."⁵⁰

One result of Major's death was increased police protection in Mahanoy City. A special meeting of the borough council was held November 5, 1874, to take account of the death of Major. Council drew up a long resolution to Major's memory and at the December 7, 1874, meeting granted a full year's salary to Mrs. Major which amounted to \$100.00.⁵¹

⁴⁸Ibid., April 24, 1874.

⁴⁹Munsell, History of Schuylkill County: 231.

⁵⁰Miners Journal, Pottsville, November 6, 1874.

⁵¹Mahanoy City, Borough Council, Minutes of the Borough Meetings, November 5, 1874, MS, Borough Hall, Mahanoy City.

Police services and protection doubled after the death of Major as can be seen by comparing the police budget of July, 1874, with that of December, 1874, before and after the assassination. The bills for police services approved by council on July 6, 1874, amounted to \$95.00 paid to ten men.⁵² At the December 7, 1874, council meeting Chief Burgess Koch, who succeeded Major, was instructed to employ three policemen with the approval of the Fire and Police Committee, to serve from six o'clock in the evening to five o'clock in the morning and receive a salary of \$60.00 per month. These three men were in addition to the regular part time policemen of the borough.⁵³

At the December 16, 1874, meeting of council, a special committee of six citizens made several recommendations to halt the growing lawlessness. These included; erection of twenty-five street lamps, increased police regulations including enforcement of strict sobriety upon all policemen, payment of all fines for arrest to the borough treasurer and not to the arresting officer, the lighting and extinguishing of street lamps by officers, and proper disposition of force at fires to prevent any interference with firemen. Council complied immediately with all the suggestions and also outlawed the firing of guns and pistols on Christmas and New Year's Day.⁵⁴

The next day, council met again and imposed stricter regulations on the Chief of Police who at that time was William J. Watkins. The

⁵²Ibid., December 7, 1874.

⁵³Ibid., July 6, 1874.

⁵⁴Ibid., December 7, 1874.

chief of police served as the chief executive of the police department, subject to the instructions of the Fire and Police Committee of council. He had the power to suspend and appoint patrolmen, pending final approval of the Fire and Police Committee and was required to enter a detailed statement dealing with all fines, arrests, and occurrences each week. Council also set higher standards for policemen such as physical health, vigor, unimpaired sight and hearing, ability to read and write, and habitual sobriety. Finally, policemen were to be on call twenty-four hours a day if called by the chief of police.⁵⁵

Another major protective agency needed by all communities is an adequate fire department. Fire protection, like that of police protection, is an essential requirement in any urban center. An adequately manned and equipped fire department not only minimizes the loss of life and property from fire hazards, but it also serves to attract new people and businesses to a city.

The first fire company in Mahanoy City was the Human Fire Company No. 1, organized June 18, 1868, with twenty-five original members. The first officers were Frederick L. Spiegel, president, William R. Yost, secretary, and Phaon Hermany, treasurer.⁵⁶ The original headquarters located northeast of Main Street were abandoned in 1888 when the company moved into their present headquarters one block east of Main Street on Mahanoy Street.⁵⁷

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Munsell, History of Schuylkill County: 230-231.

⁵⁷Centennial Committee, Mahanoy City, Pennsylvania, 1863-Centennial-1963 Souvenir Program (Mahanoy City, 1963), n.p.

The second fire company to organize in Mahanoy City was the Citizens Steam Fire Company No. 2. This company, organized February 10, 1870, had as its initial officers several prominent men. Edward S. Silliman was elected as the first president with Dr. Louis M. T. Thompson, treasurer, and Lucien Troutman as secretary.⁵⁸ The first home of the company was located at First and Mahanoy Streets from 1870 to 1886 when they moved to their present quarters at First and Pine Streets, next to the borough jail.⁵⁹

Two other fire companies were organized in Mahanoy City in the nineteenth century. The Washington Hook and Ladder Company No. 1, in 1886 and the Good American Hose Company No. 3, in 1893. The latter company was composed of predominately German citizens of Mahanoy City. The Washington Hook and Ladder Company was located next to the Humane, one block east of Main Street on Mahanoy Street and the Good American Hose Company No. 3 located in the eastern end of the borough in the eight-hundred block on Mahanoy Street.⁶⁰

Mahanoy City had its share of disastrous fires in its early years. There is evidence of cooperation between the fire companies of different boroughs as early as 1882. For example, a major fire occurred Sunday afternoon December 3, 1882, in the business district of Mahanoy City. The fire, too serious for the Mahanoy companies to fight alone, resulted in aid from the Tamaqua and Shenandoah fire companies.

⁵⁸Munsell, History of Schuylkill County: 231.

⁵⁹Centennial Committee, Souvenir Program, n.p.

⁶⁰Ibid., n.p.

Appreciation of this aid was acknowledged at the January 2, 1883, meeting of borough council, when it sent framed copies of thanks to the Columbia Fire Company of Tamaqua and the Perseverance Fire Company of Shenandoah for their help and aid in fighting the disastrous December 3, 1882, fire.⁶¹

By 1893 Mahanoy City could boast of four organized fire companies within the borough. The population of the town grew from 5,533 in 1870 to 7,181 in 1880 and the 1890 census counted 11,286 residents in the borough.⁶² Council worked closely with representatives of the four fire companies in perfecting the organization, building suitable housing places, and equipping the fire companies with adequate fire prevention and control apparatus. On several occasions council, on motion, agreed to pay up to half the cost towards the purchase of new hose carriages, provided the purchase proved satisfactory to the council members.

The Fire and Water Committee of borough council acted as the main artery through which communication flowed between the representatives of the fire companies and council. All questions of funding were first studied by the fire and water committee and then, if approved, referred to council for action. The early fire alarm system relied mostly upon the actions of individual citizens and their ability to

⁶¹Mahanoy City, Borough Council, Minutes of the Borough Meetings, January 3, 1883, MS, Borough Hall, Mahanoy City.

⁶²United States, Bureau of Census, Census of Population: 1950, I. Number of Inhabitants (Washington, D. C., 1952): 12-38.

spread the alarm by word of mouth. However, this system improved greatly in 1878 when the Fire and Water Committee reported to council that arrangements were made to have the Lutheran Church bell ring in case of fire.⁶³ The Lutheran Church was located at Main and Mahanoy only one block away from the police department, the Humane, and the Citizens Fire Companies.

The residents of Mahanoy City, as in other urban areas, required water for a variety of purposes including human consumption, waste disposal, and fire protection. As long as the water supply was incomplete, the volunteer fire departments were severely handicapped. The answer to this problem came on May 5, 1869, when the State Legislature authorized the borough of Mahanoy City to construct a water works, borrow money for that purpose and appoint water commissioners.

The 1864 act authorized the borough to construct a water works, borrow money for that purpose and appoint three water commissioners, two of which were to be council members. Coupon bonds were issued in the amount of \$75,000. The council and water commissioners were given power to construct a basin or reservoir and lay down pipes to carry the water. Also, the 1864 act gave council and the water commissioners power and authority to pass all ordinances pertaining to the operation of the water company.⁶⁴

The first commissioners of the water company were Edward S. Silliman, president, Frank Carter, secretary, and John Eichman, collector

⁶³Mahanoy City, Borough Council, Minutes of the Borough Meetings, June 4, 1878, MS, Borough Hall, Mahanoy City.

⁶⁴Pennsylvania, Laws of Pennsylvania 1864 (Harrisburg, 1865), II: 834.

and superintendent. A tract of land about two miles north of the borough, containing a fine mountain spring flowing from the red shale was leased from the Girard Estate. A reservoir was constructed to furnish a constant supply of water to the adjacent collieries, fire departments, mills, and private consumers.⁶⁵

The benefits of a water supply system in Mahanoy City were well appreciated by the people. Evidence of this fact came in February, 1866, when the State Legislature passed an act incorporating the Mahanoy City Water Company. The incorporation act, passed February 15, 1866, listed Edward S. Silliman, Frank Carter, James Collins, Benjamin T. Hughes, Frederick Gantort, and John G. Neps as incorporators.⁶⁶

The act of incorporation stated that the company shall have power to erect and maintain all the works and machinery for supplying water to Mahanoy City. It provided for a capital stock of \$100,000, divided into shares of \$25.00 each bearing interest rates of not more than eight percent per year. Finally, the act empowered the company to fix and establish all the necessary rules and regulations for the operation of the company and to declare dividends of the net profits.⁶⁷

The completion of the water works, warmly greeted by Mahanoy City residents, was publicly praised by the Mahanoy City Gazette when it congratulated the incorporators of the Mahanoy City Water Works in November, 1866.⁶⁸ Three months after the completion of the water works

⁶⁵Munsell, History of Schuylkill County: 233.

⁶⁶Pennsylvania, Laws of Pennsylvania 1866 (Harrisburg, 1867): 169.

⁶⁷Ibid.; 169-170.

⁶⁸Miners Journal, Pottsville, November 3, 1866.

the borough council signed an agreement with the water company to build seven fire plugs in the borough, and council agreed to pay twenty-five dollars per year for each plug.⁶⁹ Under the leadership provided by men such as Edward S. Silliman and John Eichman, the Mahanoy City Water Company enlarged its services as Mahanoy City grew in population and the demand for water increased. By 1880 about two miles of mains and three miles of distributing pipes were laid, and in 1880 a new reservoir was erected.⁷⁰

As Mahanoy City matured, the next major municipal service to be constructed in the borough came on February 21, 1874, with the incorporation of the Mahanoy City Gas Company. Once again Edward S. Silliman was deeply involved with the corporation. Its first directors were Silliman, William F. Smith, George H. Troutman, and William L. Yoder who worked with an authorized capital of \$30,000.⁷¹ At the March 2, 1874, meeting of council a petition of the company directors was read and approved asking for the right to erect and maintain a gas works within the borough limits and for the power to lay down pipes upon public streets and alleys.⁷² The gas works was completed on October 1, 1874, with about two miles of pipes having been laid. The gas was made from naptha, and the company erected its building on Railroad Street at

⁶⁹Mahanoy City, Borough Council, Minutes of the Borough Meetings, February 15, 1867, MS, Borough Hall, Mahanoy City.

⁷⁰Munsell, History of Schuylkill County: 233.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Mahanoy City, Borough Council, Minutes of the Borough Meetings, March 2, 1874, MS, Borough Hall, Mahanoy City.

Second Street.⁷³ Cooperation between the borough council and the directors of the gas company did not go as smoothly as did cooperation between the water company and borough council.

The first meeting between borough council and representatives of the Mahanoy City Gas Company took place at the December 23, 1874, meeting of council when the borough rejected a gas company offer of \$2.75 charge for each gas light every three months. An agreement was not reached on this problem until the spring of 1875 when council instructed the Fire and Police Committee to confer with the gas company. On May 7, 1875, the committee reported to council the gas company would furnish fuel for the borough at \$3.00 per lamp post per month, a large increase over earlier offers, or at a specified rate per one-thousand feet of gas. Council quickly rejected the three-dollar rate and decided on approving the latter plan calling for the erection of gas meters.⁷⁴

Two years later in January, 1877, another problem arose on the question of gas rates. The gas company in February, 1877, asked for a charge of \$2.75 per lamp post per month, which council rejected. This controversy remained unsolved until March of 1877 when councilmen Wenrich and Roberts in negotiations with the gas company offered a borough bid of \$1.50 per lamp post per month. The gas company rejected that bid, but on March 26, 1877, offered to accept a bid of \$1.75 per

⁷³Munsell, History of Schuylkill County: 233.

⁷⁴Mahanoy City, Borough Council, Minutes of the Borough Meetings, December 1874 - May 1875, MS, Borough Hall, Mahanoy City.

lamp post per month to which council agreed.⁷⁵ Several times after 1877 disputes over gas prices broke out between the gas company and members of borough council. The gas rates fluctuated during these controversies. For example, in 1881 the borough paid \$255.00 per six months at the rate of \$1.25 per lamp post per month for thirty-four lamps.⁷⁶ In 1884 the gas company received payment at a rate of \$1.75 per lamp per month on condition that the lights, except for four, be extinguished by three in the morning.⁷⁷

In addition to gas and water services, Mahanoy City by 1888 had its own light, heat, and power company. On December 16, 1887, the Mahanoy City Light, Heat and Power Company was incorporated with a capital of \$15,000. This act by the Pennsylvania Legislature gave the corporation authority to furnish light, heat, and power to the people of Mahanoy City and vicinity by means of steam power and electricity or by other means.⁷⁸ Edward S. Silliman served as president and his close friend, William L. Yoder, served as treasurer. On November 8, 1887, a special election was held in Mahanoy City to decide for or against the electrification of the town. At the November 10 meeting of council the vote was revealed. The town voted almost unanimously for the electric power service; 1139 votes were cast on the question with 1084 favoring

⁷⁵Ibid. (1877).

⁷⁶Ibid. (July 5, 1881).

⁷⁷Ibid. (February 5, 1884).

⁷⁸Pennsylvania, Laws of Pennsylvania 1889 (Harrisburg, 1890): a233.

electrification of the borough.⁷⁹ This corporation greatly advanced the town in the eyes of residents and visitors alike. Borough council accepted in 1889 light for one year at a set cost of \$115.00 for each electric street light installed.⁸⁰

Just as Edward S. Silliman dominated the early years of the 1870s and early 1880s, Charles D. Kaier dominated the 1890s in Mahanoy City. By 1892 his brewery was producing over 100,000 barrels of beer annually and employing about three-hundred people. Kaier led the way to improvements, using his brewery and popularity as a power base. Kaier effected the founding of the Mahanoy City Electric Railroad Company, which held its first meeting in 1890. The capital stock of the company was fixed at \$100,000, the stock to be divided into 10,000 shares of ten dollars each for the purpose of building an electric railway system in Mahanoy City.⁸¹ The trolley route by August of 1892 extended westward from Mahanoy City to Coles, Wiggans, St. Nicholas, Gilberton, and Mahanoy Plane. By 1893, it extended eastward past Buck Mountain and Vulcan into the Hosensock Valley as far as Lakeside, a distance of about five miles. The railway aided miners getting to work and people wanting to come to Mahanoy City to work in the factories or shops in the borough.

Charles D. Kaier continued building his power and influence in the 1890s with the creation of the Anthracite Light, Heat, and Power

⁸⁰Ibid. (November 17, 1889).

⁸¹Miners Journal, Pottsville, October 24, 1890.

Company in 1896 with a capital stock of \$5,000. Kaier controlled this company which was smaller than Silliman's Electric Light, Heat and Power Company. The purpose of the corporation was to supply light, heat, and power to the borough of Mahanoy City.⁸³ The Broad Mountain Water Company was founded in March, 1898, having a capital stock of \$5,000.⁸⁴ This corporation was formed for the purpose of supplying water and ice to persons and corporations in Mahanoy City. Mainly, the company supplied the water for the Kaier brewery. Charles D. Kaier was the head of this water company which supplied most of the ice for the borough consumers. Kaier built his dam about two miles south of Mahanoy City on a section of the Broad Mountain.

Mahanoy City became more urban in stature as the town developed, improving police and fire protection. Banks, factories, and stores opened in the borough and the population grew. The few scattered houses of the early 1860s became a fair sized town with paved streets, lighted by electricity. The residents formed together to fight not only fires and crimes but potentially destructive problems also.

The most notable example of the citizens working together for the common good of the borough through a legal, organized body came in the winter and spring of 1877. The problem described was the undermining of a portion of Mahanoy City by the George W. Cole Company and the fears generated by this action.

The trouble began at the February 26, 1877, meeting of borough

⁸³Pennsylvania, Laws of Pennsylvania 1897 (Harrisburg, 1898): 686.

⁸⁴Ibid., (1899): 495.

council held to listen to a committee of citizens in reference to damages likely to follow the undermining of the town by the George W. Cole operations. The citizens presented a petition to council asking it to take action in defense of the town. The petition was accepted, and council decided to join the citizens in asking the court to grant an injunction restraining the Cole operation from any further undermining. Council instructed the solicitor to take the necessary legal steps and further provided for the borough to pay one-half of all the expenses involved in the foregoing instruction.⁸⁵

George H. Troutman, brother of Louis W. Troutman, the land agent for the P. & R. C. & I. Co. in Mahanoy City, represented the borough. George Troutman was a close friend of Edward S. Silliman as well as a fellow director with Silliman on the board of the Mahanoy City Gas Company. Conrad F. Shindel represented Cole and James Ellis represented the P. & R. C. & I. Co.⁸⁶ The court faced the following problem: George W. Cole, a tennant of the P. & R. C. & I. Co., was mining at Maple and Spruce Streets, South Alley, and Mahanoy Avenue, running in one direction and D, C, B, A, and Catawissa Streets, Second and First Alley and Main Street in another direction. Cole, as tennant of the P. & R. C. & I. Co., claimed rights to the land under which these streets and alleys were laid out and stated he had the right to mine and carry away all coal lying beneath this ground from his colliery situated about one mile west of the western boundary of the borough to about the line

⁸⁵Mahanoy City, Borough Council, Minutes of the Borough Meetings, February 26, 1877, MS, Borough Hall, Mahanoy City.

⁸⁶Miners Journal, Pottsville, April 10, 1877.

of Second Street.⁸⁷

This claim, if approved, would give George W. Cole authority to undermine almost one-third of Mahanoy City, specifically, the southwest and northwest portions of the town. The citizens and town council of Mahanoy City claimed this would endanger their lives as well as the existence of their homes and businesses located on the previously mentioned streets.

On March 8, 1877, the court granted a special injunction against Cole to restrain him from mining until a court hearing could be arranged.⁸⁸ The hearing took place during the first week in May, 1877, and the court found in favor of the borough of Mahanoy City.⁸⁹

The court ruled that the George W. Cole operations or the P. & R. C. & I. Co. could not continue mining any coal within the limits of the borough. No pillars of coal between the breasts, within the borough limits could be removed, and Cole and the P. & R. C. & I. Co. had to pay all the court costs, including the cost of engineers selected by both parties to study the problem.

This decision was a great victory for the town over the power of the Reading Railroad. It proved the leaders and citizens of the borough were becoming identified with each other and the borough's success. The people were becoming urbanized, and they realized what could be accomplished by working together through borough council to benefit all the citizens of the town.

⁸⁷Miners Journal, Pottsville, March 9, 1877.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Ibid., May 4, 1877.

CHAPTER V

Religious and Ethnic Rivalries in Mahanoy City

Mahanoy City in the nineteenth century can be divided into two distinct religious groups, each having their own leaders, ideals, and goals. The Protestant section was led by Edward S. Silliman, George Wiggan, William L. Yoder and others who were basically Episcopalian in religious beliefs and Republican in political beliefs. The opposing group consisted of the Catholic-Democrats led exclusively by Charles D. Kaier.

This rivalry based on religion and politics can first be seen in terms of Silliman and Kaier and the actions taken and leadership provided by both men. In early Mahanoy City, at least from 1864 to 1875, the Protestant-Republican culture was supreme, and it was only after Charles D. Kaier began leading the Catholics and Democrats that this latter group began catching up with the Protestant-Republicans in terms of power and influence.

Beginning with the differences between Kaier and Silliman, it became clear that while both were great boosters of Mahanoy City, both took separate paths to achieve personal success and prosperity. For instance, both men were active in their churches, but in different religions and both were active in politics but in opposing political parties. Both men were active in banking, but in rival banks. Kaier and Silliman found themselves supporting rival financial companies such as

Silliman's Mahanoy City Water Company versus Kaier's Broad Mountain Water Company and Silliman's Electric Light, Heat and Power Company versus Kaier's Anthracite Light, Heat and Power Company.

First of all it is important to see the base of power which enabled both men to become successful leaders. Edward S. Silliman's power was three-fold: one, his colliery on the northern limits of the borough which employed about two-hundred men annually; two, his financial and business involvement; three, his political popularity and power.

Kaier, on the other hand, was involved solely in a business capacity, having no mining activities. Kaier's source of power was derived mainly from his brewery and its related shops. The brewery was the largest non-mining employer in the nineteenth century in Mahanoy City.¹ Using his brewery as a basis of power, Kaier branched out into banking activities in Mahanoy City and other basin towns. Kaier also was involved with water and ice companies, electricity and power companies and trolley car services in and around Mahanoy City.

One of the basic differences between Edward S. Silliman and Charles D. Kaier lay in opposing religious beliefs. Silliman, an Episcopalian by birth, had several close friends of the same belief such as William L. Yoder, Frank Wenrich, Thomas Westcott, and George Wiggan. Although Silliman was not prominently identified with the Protestant Temperance Groups, some of his close friends and business partners were active in the movement. One of Silliman's closest friends, George Wiggan,

¹J. H. Beers, et. al., Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania, Geneology-Family History-Biography (Chicago, 1916): 165-167.

was active in the temperance movement in Mahanoy City.² Also, the First National Bank, which Silliman controlled, provided the headquarters for the lodge, and in 1868 added another story to the building for that specific reason.³

All of this temperance activity was a direct affront to Charles D. Kaier who made his livelihood by selling the very beverage which the Temperance Society attacked. The Temperance Society never became successful in its attempts to eliminate drinking in Mahanoy City, and equally important, the reputation and respect acquired by Kaier was never seriously threatened in Mahanoy City.

Mahanoy City was, however, a highly religious community. By August, 1866, just two years after the incorporation of the town, Mahanoy City boasted of ten churches.⁴ The First Presbyterian Church, located on South Main Street in Mahanoy City, claims the honor of being the first church erected in the borough. This was followed by the Salem United Evangelical Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church both erected in 1861. St. Paul's Evangelical and Reformed Church was constructed in 1862, and the Faith Episcopal Church opened in 1864. In 1865 the Welsh erected the Zion Welsh Baptist and the Welsh Congregational Church. The eighth and ninth churches erected in Mahanoy City were both Catholic Churches, being St. Canicus and St. Fidelis Churches in 1866. Finally,

²Miners Journal, Pottsville, July 21, 1866.

³Ibid., August 8, 1868.

⁴Ibid.

the Primitive Methodist Church was erected in 1866, becoming the tenth organized church in Mahanoy City.⁵

All of the churches mentioned were built in or near the center of the town. St. Canicus, built on the west side of Catawissa Street, marked the western limit while the Welsh Congregational Church on East Fifth Street and Center marked the eastern extension of church building by 1866. The distance from St. Canicus to the Welsh Congregational Church was only seven blocks. The distance as measured from north to south was only four blocks.⁶

As the town extended geographically, so did the location of newly erected churches. In 1867, three churches, all Protestant, were erected still close to the center of town. These churches were the First Baptist Church, Christ Lutheran Church, and St. John's English Lutheran Church.⁷ Geographical expansion belonged to the Catholic churches in Mahanoy City during the nineteenth century.

In 1888 St. Joseph's Church was erected at West Sixth Street on Mahanoy Avenue, and in 1891, St. Mary's Greek Catholic Church was erected across Mahanoy Avenue from St. Joseph's. In 1894 St. Mary's Slavonian Church was erected near the western limits of the borough at Center and West Seventh Street. The far eastern section of Mahanoy City remained without a church until the Italian community built the Sacred Heart

⁵Joseph Henry Zerbey, ed., History of Pottsville and Schuylkill County (Pottsville, 1935), III: 1266.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

Church at Twelfth and East Pine Street in 1908.⁸

Opposition to drinking formed the basis of an organized Protestant movement in December, 1865, when the Mahanoy City Order of the Sons of Temperance began regular meetings. One of the first meetings was held in the Presbyterian Church and attended by about fifty members.⁹

The group held periodic meetings in the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches in Mahanoy City and often invited guest speakers from around the county. Loyal Division, No. 11, Sons of Temperance, as the Mahanoy City group was called, met with moderate support. The Miners Journal commented, "The prospects of temperance are very encouraging in Mahanoy City. The Division scarce six months old now boast of 96 sons and 73 daughters."¹⁰ The society attended meetings throughout the county and in July, 1866, hosted its own meeting and parade. At this meeting, Charles A. Bosbyshell of Pottsville delivered the main address, setting forth the efforts being made for "the good cause of temperance which he hoped will result in the final overthrow of the Hydra-headed monster--Intemperance."¹¹

The most prominent member of the Mahanoy City Temperance Society was George F. Wiggan.¹² Otherwise the membership was composed mostly of Protestant clergymen and members of their churches. The societies worked

⁸Ibid.

⁹Miners Journal, Pottsville, December 2, 1865.

¹⁰Ibid., March 3, 1866.

¹¹Ibid., July 21, 1866.

¹²Ibid.

through borough council but met with little success in stopping an increasing number of saloons from opening. However, they did succeed for a while in 1874, when by organized opposition, the Temperance Society forced borough council to pass an ordinance forbidding liquor sales on Sundays within the borough limits.¹³

The Temperance Society was able to stop liquor sales on Sundays in Mahanoy City, but never had any success in stopping the increase of saloons in the borough. The popularity of saloons and drinking was characteristic of most of the boroughs of Schuylkill County. In 1887, for instance, revenue from county taverns was \$40,545.75, which ranked as the third highest in Pennsylvania following only the much more populous Philadelphia and Allegheny counties in that order.¹⁴

Peter Roberts, who extensively studied life in nineteenth-century anthracite coal communities, considered saloons to be important not only for social purposes but also for political reasons. Most boroughs and townships held primaries and elections in saloons, and a great deal of campaigning went on in those establishments.¹⁵

Roberts examined in depth the drinking characteristics of Mahanoy City, and his research revealed the failure of the Temperance movement in the borough. Table IV reveals the number of saloons and saloons per persons in the final decade of the nineteenth century in Mahanoy City.

¹³Mahanoy City, Borough Council, Minutes of the Borough Meetings, April 6, 1874, MS, Borough Hall, Mahanoy City.

¹⁴Pennsylvania, Official Documents 1887 (Harrisburg, 1888), I: 119.

¹⁵Peter Roberts, Anthracite Coal Communities (New York, 1904): 326.

TABLE IV

Mahanoy City Liquor Licenses			
Year	Population	Licenses Granted	Persons/Saloon
1890	11,286	79	143.8
1899	13,283	130	102.1
1900	13,504	135	100.0

Source: Peter Roberts, Anthracite Coal Communities (New York, 1904): 226.

In examining Table IV several observations can be made. The most revealing statistic, persons/saloon, was based on dividing the number of saloons into the total population. However, in considering this statistic, it must be remembered that the total population also included thousands of women, young girls and small children who normally would not drink. Realizing the fact, along with the use in the number of saloons from 79 to 135 in ten years, evidence indicates that the majority of men, socially allowed to drink, did so, and in great amounts.

Another notable fact is found in comparing saloons and populations in 1899 and 1900 and the increases in both. The population increased from 13,283 to 13,504, an increase of 221 people with a corresponding increase of five saloons, a rate of forty persons per saloon. Roberts also explored the question of who owned the saloons in Mahanoy City during the 1890s.

TABLE V

Year	Native Americans	German	Irish	Welsh	Slavic	Totals
1890	22	24	25	4	4	79
1900	24	24	42	7	38	135

Source: Peter Roberts, Anthracite Coal Communities (New York, 1904): 226.

As shown in Table V, saloons in 1890 were somewhat evenly divided among native Americans, Germans, and Irish vendors. By 1900 the number of saloons owned by Irish increased heavily, but the most notable increase came with the Slavs. Saloons owned by Slavs increased almost ten times in number from 1890 to 1900. By 1900 80 of the 135 saloons, over one-half, were owned by the Irish and the Slavs. Most of the saloons were located along both sides of Center Street in Mahanoy City. It is also important to notice the small number of Welsh saloons in the borough, only four in 1890, and seven in 1900. The Welsh, who were predominantly Protestant, were active in the Temperance movement in Mahanoy City, and therefore, had few among them engaged in selling "demon rum." The great majority of saloons were owned by Catholic Germans and Irish.

The Mahanoy City Temperance Society had a formidable foe in the saloon business of nineteenth-century Mahanoy City. In scanning the newspapers of the period, the violence connected with the many saloons of Mahanoy City becomes evident. In the 1860s the Irish were usually blamed by the press for the outrages. The English and Welsh were usually

referred to as "respectable citizens" while the Irish were portrayed as irresponsible, drunken sots who always drank bad whiskey.¹⁶

However, by the 1870s the blame for disturbances and violence shifted to the Polish residents of the county. Racism was obvious in the release of the 1870 press. For example, a notice under Mahanoy News in the Pottsville Miners Journal states, "Our valley is being filled up with Polanders, who seem to drop into work immediately after they come, whilst a number of our outside laboring men cannot get a job to do."¹⁷

Racist attitudes continued to be displayed in the borough in the 1880s. The object of these attacks in the 1880s were often the Hungarians. For instance, in May, 1882, a group of "respectable citizens" appeared before Mahanoy City borough council with a petition asking the council to take action on the "dangerous incursion of Hungarians in the borough."¹⁸

Racism was also found in Mahanoy City with the Italians, the last ethnic group to arrive in the nineteenth century. The Italians lived almost exclusively in the eastern end of the borough where they established their own Italian Catholic Church.¹⁹ Even today the Italian community of Mahanoy City is centered in the eastern end of town.

¹⁶Miners Journal, Pottsville, August 20, 1864.

¹⁷Ibid., May 1, 1874.

¹⁸Mahanoy City, Borough Council, Minutes of the Borough Meetings, May 7, 1882, MS, Borough Hall, Mahanoy City.

¹⁹Zerbey, History of Pottsville and Schuylkill County, III: 1266

Religion in Mahanoy City provided the basis for other organizations, in addition to the Temperance Society. Most notably the Masonic Lodge No. 357 was chartered in August of 1865, the first officers being Philip Conrad, Frederick Kolb, and Peter Harmen, and had thirty-one original members.²⁰ The Masonic Lodge met with great success, meeting on the second floor of Silliman's First National Bank.²¹ The Catholic counterpoint of the Masons, the Knights of Columbus, was not formed in Mahanoy City until 1900.²²

In addition to church oriented groups, numerous social groups and clubs of every type existed in nineteenth-century Mahanoy City. One of the earliest groups to organize in Mahanoy City was the Odd Fellows who dedicated their new lodge in 1864.²³ The General Grant Lodge, No. 575, I.O.O.F. was instituted June 18, 1864, with twelve charter members. By 1880 this lodge encompassed 166 men, being one of the largest in numbers and financial strength in the county.²⁴

The Severn Post, 110, G.A.R. of Mahanoy City was named for Captain E. L. Severn, one of its most prominent members. The post numbered 35 men in 1880 with Jacob Bricker, a former chief burgess, as its top officer.²⁵ There also existed in Mahanoy City many small, local

²⁰Miners Journal, Pottsville, August 26, 1865.

²¹Ibid., August 8, 1868.

²²Centennial Committee, Mahanoy City, Pa. 1863 - Centennial - 1963 Souvenir Program (Mahanoy City, 1963): n.p.

²³Miners Journal, Pottsville, July 2, 1864.

²⁴W. W. Munsell, History of Schuylkill County (New York, 1881): 234.

²⁵Ibid.

benevolent societies as well as larger nation-wide institutions. The town had a Y. M. C. A., formed in 1876, which held regular meetings and maintained a reading room. However, the association lasted only two years, suspending operation in 1878.²⁶

One of the largest non-political and non-religious groups in Mahanoy City was the Fish and Game Protective Association which had a membership of over 300 people in 1893 with Edward S. Silliman as president.²⁷ The purpose of this organization was to protect the local hunting areas and encourage safety in hunting. The organization also was concerned with stocking local streams and keeping them clean to support fish life.

As population increased in the eastern end of the Mahanoy basin and even before Mahanoy City was incorporated as a borough, the local residents recognized the need for a school system. The first documented meeting of a school board in Mahanoy City came in 1862 when Frank Carter, Dr. Louis Thompson, David Klingerman, Mr. Walborn, and one other unidentified person met to initiate a school program. Oliver Bechtel was appointed as the first teacher and held classes in a log school house located at Spruce and Linden Streets.²⁸

The first permanent brick school house in Mahanoy City was the Pine Street Building, located at Third Alley on Pine. This building, completed in 1867 and costing \$7,646.82, was built on approval of the

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Tri-Weekly Record, Mahanoy City, March 11, 1893.

²⁸Zerbey, History of Pottsville, III: 1266.

1867 school board.²⁹ The school board in 1867 consisted of President George F. Wiggan; Secretary David Philips; Treasurer William L. Yoder; and Tax Collector John Eichman.³⁰ During the first year in which the new elementary school was opened, enrollment rose rapidly. Between the new Pine Street building and seven smaller buildings, enrollment for the 1867 school year reached a total of 974 pupils, 514 being males and 460 being females.³¹

The public school systems in Schuylkill County ranked among the best in the State, and the Mahanoy City schools ranked among the best in Schuylkill County. In the 1877 estimate of the value of school property in Pennsylvania, Schuylkill County ranked fourth from the top, with an estimated value of \$759,295.30. Schuylkill County followed only Allegheny, Luzerne, and Philadelphia counties in the estimated values of school properties.³²

The Mahanoy City School District ranked among the best in Schuylkill County. In 1872 Mahanoy City was one of only three boroughs in the county having a public school library, the others being Cressona and Ashland.³³ By 1873, Mahanoy City had 1,457 students enrolled in the borough schools³⁴ and by 1874, was one of only three boroughs in

²⁹Ibid.; 1267.

³⁰Miners Journal, Pottsville, June 22, 1867.

³¹Ibid.

³²Pennsylvania, Legislative Documents 1877 (Harrisburg, 1878), III: 795.

³³Pennsylvania, Executive Documents 1872 (Harrisburg, 1873): 163.

³⁴Ibid., (1873): 317.

Schuylkill County requiring the teaching of German in its schools.³⁵ The other boroughs requiring similar language studies were Ashland and Tamaqua.³⁶ By 1876, the Mahanoy City School District employed 17 teachers in charge of 1,423 pupils. The average length of the school year was ten months with approximately twenty-five percent of the borough population attending school. One interesting note on the education system lies in the fact that the six male teachers received \$65.00 each per year while the eleven female teachers received only \$37.73 each per year.³⁷

The Mahanoy City schools were a valid source of pride to the borough residents. One new school building was built during each of the last four decades of the nineteenth century, keeping abreast of the growing population. The record attendance for any one school year in Mahanoy City up to 1900 came in 1893. That year 32 teachers instructed 1,087 females and 1,080 males for a combined total of 2,267 pupils.³⁸

One possible reason for public school enrollment peaking in 1893 could be attributed to the development of the parochial school system in the borough by 1894. The first Catholic school to develop was St. Fidelis, the German Catholic School, in 1873. St. Fidelis remained the only parochial school in Mahanoy City until 1894 when the large

³⁵Ibid., (1874): 134.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Pennsylvania, Legislative Documents 1876 (Harrisburg, 1877), I: 367.

³⁸Pennsylvania, Official Documents 1893 (Harrisburg, 1894), IV: 370.

Lithuanian Catholic parish, St. Joseph's, opened a school on West Mahanoy Avenue.³⁹ The large Catholic population of Mahanoy City usually sent their children to the parish school in order to receive a Catholic education.

The intellectual activities of Mahanoy City residents were not solely confined to the education available in the school but branched out to music, the arts, and the theatre as well. As early as January of 1864, traveling vocalists would present public concerts in the borough and other county towns.⁴⁰ Mahanoy City also boasted of a debating club in 1865, meeting weekly to discuss and debate questions of local, state, and national importance.

Among the best musical groups in Mahanoy City was the Citizens Silver Cornet Band organized in April of 1868. The band's first leader was Jacob Britz, and many of its members were leading citizens of Mahanoy City. The group also had a reading room located on South Main Street.⁴²

Several reading clubs existed in pre-1900 Mahanoy City. A Chautauqua Circle flourished in the 1890s, having about twenty members. Two other reading clubs existed in Mahanoy City, averaging about twelve members each. Mahanoy City also had a public library connected with the

³⁹Centennial Committee, Mahanoy City, Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania 1863-1963 - A History (Mahanoy City, 1963): 34.

⁴⁰Miners Journal, Pottsville, January 30, 1864.

⁴¹Ibid., November 18, 1865.

⁴²Munsell, History of Schuylkill County: 235.

school system with about 1,500 volumes by 1900.⁴³

Commenting on the people who made use of the library and reading clubs in Mahanoy City, Peter Roberts stated,

...the majority of the members are females--the wives and daughters of men in the professions or teachers in the public schools. From the 12,000 people, who depend upon the mines for their subsistence not a single member was taken. Of the patrons of the library very few are children of mine workers.⁴⁴

Any discussion of the educational and intellectual life in Mahanoy City must include the famous Kaier's Opera House. Charles D. Kaier purchased the Metz building at Main and Market Streets in 1885 and began a total remodeling operation. By 1893 Kaier finished his task, having built a handsome new theatre on the ground floor and a large dance hall on the second floor. The Kaier Opera House numbered among the most elaborately decorated theatres in the region.⁴⁵ The Opera House proved to be a great source of pride for all borough residents who heartily applauded Kaier's public spirit and enterprise.

⁴⁵Centennial Committee, Mahanoy City, 1863-1963: 70.

CONCLUSION

Mahanoy City during the nineteenth century developed a plural urban society. In the early 1860s, the borough, led by men such as Edward S. Silliman and George Wiggan, was basically a Protestant oriented community. The early leaders of the town, mostly Republicans, led Mahanoy City to incorporation as a borough and along a road of prosperity and development.

The influx of the Irish, Polish, and Lithuanian Catholics in great numbers during the 1870s and early 1880s represented a challenge to the Protestant-Republican values. Charles D. Kaier led the Catholic-Democratic sections of Mahanoy City on a long road toward equality. Kaier, the only man to equal Edward S. Silliman in stature and public acclaim, was responsible for the emergence of the Catholic-Democrats by the 1890s. He was greatly aided by the establishment and development of the parochial school system and the children it educated.

Both cultures, both religious groups, and both political parties had the same original foundation of power--the coal industry. The booming industry that attracted thousands of people seeking employment also created another division in Mahanoy City, this time along class lines.

The borough population was divided into a small group of business and industrial elites and the much larger lower class composed mostly of Irish, Polish, Lithuanian, and Hungarian miners. The early

banks and businesses were controlled by the Silliman-Republicans and then later shared with the Kaier-Democrats.

As conditions in the mines improved, employment possibilities diversified, and educational facilities improved, the miners and their families were able to improve their status. If a conclusion must be drawn from the preceding work, it must speak of the residents of the borough who, through hard work and sacrifice, enabled Mahanoy City to grow from a sparse settlement in the 1850s and early 1860s to a borough of over 13,000 people by 1900.

The simple but sturdy characteristics which were needed to work all day in the depth of the mines carried over to the personal lives of the people. Seldom afraid of hard work and risks, Mahanoy City residents went into debt several times to build needed schools and municipal services. In doing this the people realized there was no easy way to success, the only way being, as the official 1963 Centennial motto read; success through "coal, courage and cooperation."

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