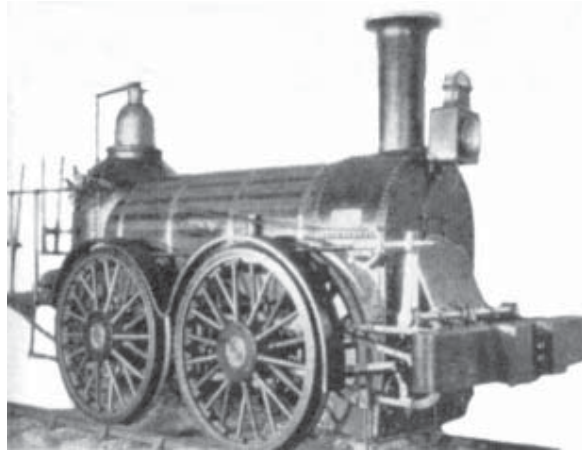




# Hard Coal Times

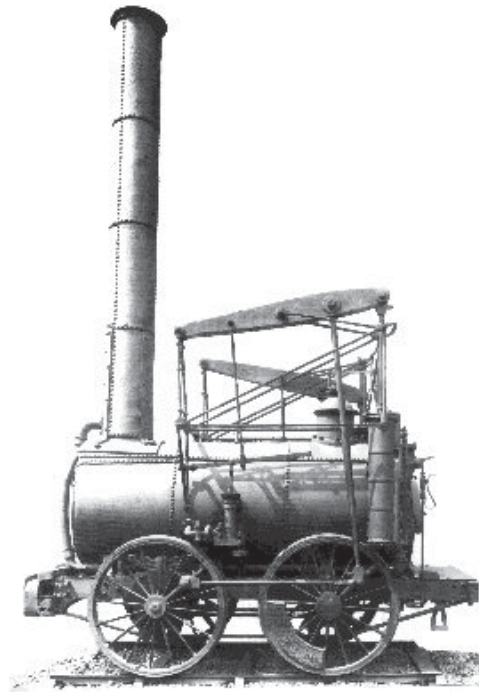
*Pennsylvania Anthracite Stories*



*Early Coal Transportation  
Who Were the Molly Maguires  
Coal Miners' Wish*



## Hard Coal Times



*The Stourbridge Lion*  
*A replica is on display at the Wayne County Historical Society,*  
*Honesdale, PA*

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## *Early Coal Transportation*

Moving materials inland from coastal cities in large quantities was a problem for our young country. Mostly moved by wagon, the early roads and trails proved slow and hazardous. Almost impassable during heavy rains or snow, these roads were the only reliable way to move goods. The growth of the country could not be curtailed by such a problem, and initiatives were launched to improve the lanes of commerce.

Canals were the first method used to solve the problem and open the interior of our great country. Used in Europe, the Middle East, and China, canals had proven their effectiveness. Chinese canals, with locks, had been around since the fifth and sixth centuries B. C. The earliest attempts in the young United States were mostly waterway improvements. These occurred from around 1779 through 1803. By 1790, there were thirty canal companies, none very successful. The first man-made canal was the Middlesex Canal that stretched twenty-eight miles out from Boston in 1803. Within fifty years, there would be 4000 canals in twenty-two states. Fifty years later, they were all gone.

Pennsylvania's first canal (1792-1794) was the Schuylkill and Susquehanna. Stretching just 15 miles, it attempted to connect the Schuylkill River with the Susquehanna River. Twenty-seven years later, it was extended and renamed the Union Canal.

Dewitt Clinton, Governor of New York, had the foresight to commission the Erie Canal. It took 25,000 workers, from 1817 to 1825, to construct the 360 mile canal at a cost of \$7,000,000. It became known as "Clinton's Ditch" during the construction. Most folks thought it was just another political blunder, wasting the taxpay-

# Hard Coal Times



*Pennsylvania anthracite coal fields*

### *Early Coal Transportation*

ers' dollars. They were proven wrong. The Erie Canal was the first commercial success and inspired the great canal boom of the early 1800's. Indirectly, it leads to the development of the railroads as well. You might also say that it was the first step of the industrialization of America.

The labor for building the canals was substantially made up of Irish immigrants, hard working men, trying to build a life in the new world. They became known as "Wild Irish Bog Trotters." Whether building canals, railroads, tunnels, bridges, or mining coal, iron, gold or silver, the Irish laborer was there to help the country grow. Often under extremely bad conditions and rarely treated well by company managers, the Irish persisted to make their way in the new world. With dignity and fortitude, they left their mark for eternity. The Industrial Revolution would certainly have arrived much slower were it not for the sweat of the Irish immigrant.

In 1825, the Schuylkill Navigation Company brought the Schuylkill Canal to Port Clinton from Philadelphia. Port Clinton became the key port for all coal out of the county. The Little Schuylkill Navigation Company was then formed to connect Tamaqua with Port Clinton to bring coal from this rich valley to market.

The Susquehanna River, the Lehigh and the Delaware were also natural conduits for the transportation of coal. They all suffered with uneven water flows and were naturals for canals. The canals were able to keep sufficient levels by channeling makeup water from the nearby rivers. Each was responsible for transporting its own share of coal from within the anthracite fields. The Susquehanna Canal had its North Branch, which brought the coal from the northern fields to Havre de Grace and the Baltimore markets. The Lehigh Canal hauled its coal from the eastern middle coal fields to

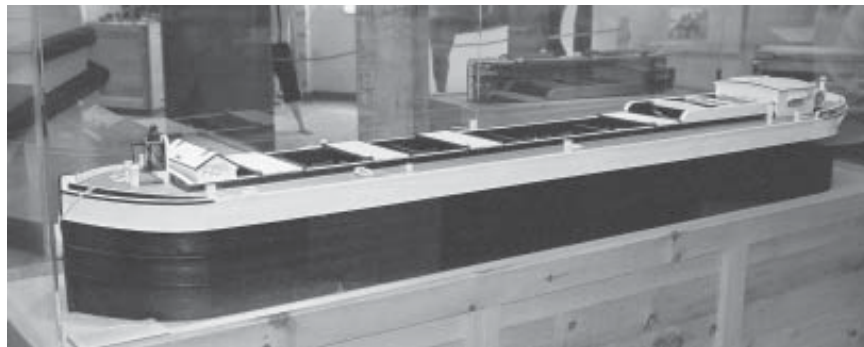
## Hard Coal Times

Philadelphia. Further north, the Delaware and Hudson Canal flowed to New York.

The major problem with the canals was the cold winter when they would freeze over. All traffic stopped. They were also slow, and if this country was to meet the hunger of industry, faster methods must be found. Enter the true visionaries, the railroad men.

### *Railroads Compete*

Although the canals were first to haul heavy loads of coal, the railroads grew right along with them. It was apparent early on that the canals would have their limitations, and the visionaries of the day would not settle for these limits. As you will recall, the first commercially successful canal, the Erie, was completed in 1825. As early as 1818, John Stevens asked the Pennsylvania House to build a railroad from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh. He finally received his charter in 1823 to build a shorter road from Philadelphia to Columbia. It is easy to see



*Canal Boat Model  
On display at the National Canal Museum  
Easton, Pennsylvania*

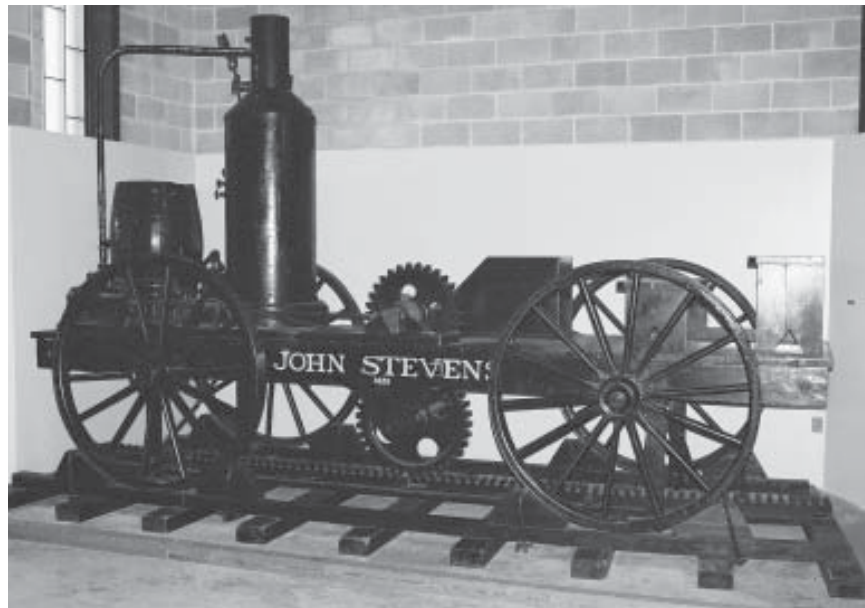
### *Early Coal Transportation*

that the two means of moving goods were now on a collision course.

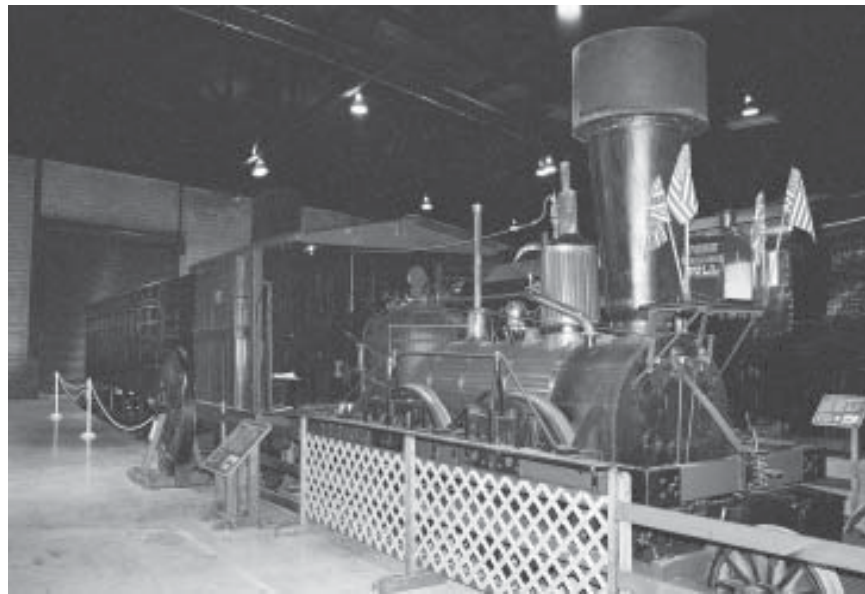
In 1825, the Schuylkill Navigation Company finished its canal that brought Schuylkill County anthracite to Philadelphia. Coal miner wages were set by the cost of coal at the new canal port of Port Clinton. With its tie to the Union Canal in Reading, the Schuylkill Canal could connect with the Susquehanna River. All the canals needed was a way to connect with Pittsburgh and the Great Lakes, and the road to the west would be opened for Philadelphia merchants. The competition became keen between the port cities of New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore for access to the new western markets. New York had the Erie Canal, and Baltimore had The National Road, which connected to the Ohio River. This brought about Pennsylvania's project, "The Main Line Canal." This was later known as the "State Works." The Main Line would consist of the Philadelphia and Columbia Railroad, which was followed by canal to the Allegheny Mountains. There you would transfer to the Allegheny Portage Railroad and then transfer back to canal to Pittsburgh.

Many other canals supplemented the Main Line as north-south feeders. Of interest to us are the Susquehanna Canal and its North Branch and the Lehigh Canal. The northern anthracite fields were able to send their coal via the North Branch. The eastern middle fields near Summit Hill sent their coal over the gravity railroad to Mauch Chunk and then on to Philadelphia via the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company's canal. The southern coalfields had the Schuylkill canal, but the western middle coalfields remained a challenge that only rail could solve. The markets to New York were also a problem that the D&H Canal could not solve alone. They, too, needed rail.

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*A replica of the steam engine developed by John Stevens. It never ran commercially, only on his estate. The replica is on display at the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania, Strasburg.*



*1831 steam engine, The John Bull, on display at the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania, Strasburg.*

*Little Schuylkill Navigation, Railroad and Coal  
Company*

In 1826, the Little Schuylkill Navigation, Railroad and Coal Company was formed by Frederick List and Isaac Hiester. They originally wanted to extend a feeder canal to a nearby coalfield; instead they built a railroad along the Little Schuylkill to Tamaqua. By 1831, it was carrying coal from the adjacent southern coalfields to Port Clinton where it could complete its journey by canal boat. Two great names of early Pennsylvania rail history come up at this time. The first is Stephen Girard, a wealthy entrepreneur from Philadelphia, and the second is Moncure Robinson, an engineer who would become the key engineer in opening the early railroads of Pennsylvania. The Little Schuylkill would later be swallowed up by the mighty Philadelphia and Reading Railroad.

In 1833, Girard also had an interest in the Little Schuylkill and Susquehanna Railroad (later the Catawissa.) This line had order two steam locomotives from England which were delivered to Tamaqua. The “Catawissa” and the “Comet” became the first two steam locomotives to haul coal. They ran from Tamaqua to Port Clinton.

*Opening the Mahanoy Valley*

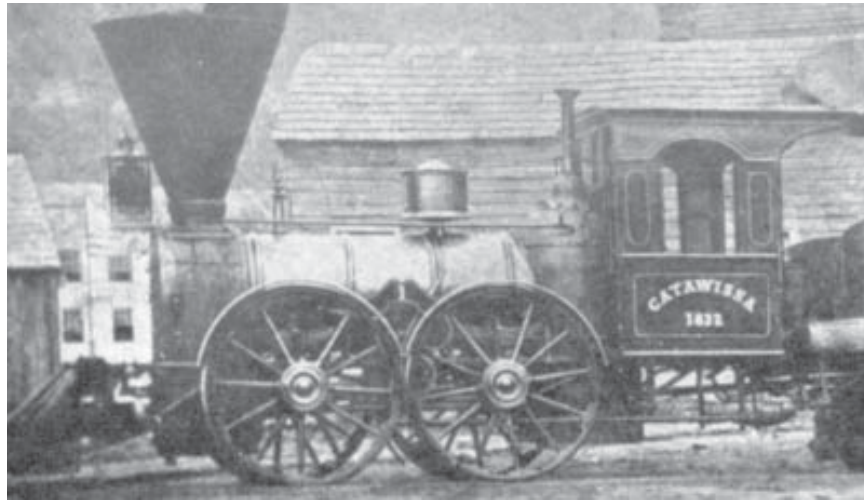
Sitting on top of the great Mammoth Vein, which at places was seventy feet thick, the Mahanoy Valley was locked by the surrounding mountainous terrain. Great visionary men could see the future that rail would provide. One of these great visionaries was Stephen Girard. He was involved in the state’s next railroad that would

## Hard Coal Times

bring Anthracite to Philadelphia, the Danville Pottsville Railroad. In addition, we will also look at two other ways out of the valley, one using the Catawissa Railroad to the north and the other east through the Mahanoy Tunnel.

### *Danville and Pottsville Railroad*

The third oldest line in Pennsylvania was chartered April 8, 1826. The brainchild of Daniel Montgomery, founder of Danville and iron mill owner, the Danville Pottsville Railroad would bring Schuylkill County anthracite coal to the iron works in Danville. Montgomery partnered with Stephen Girard, Philadelphia businessman and coal baron, to develop the newly chartered line. Girard would develop the line from the Schuylkill Canal terminus at Port Carbon to his lands in the Mahanoy Valley. Montgomery would develop the line from Danville



*The "Catawissa," one of the first steam engines to haul coal. Originally ordered for the Little Schuylkill and Susquehanna, it ran first on the Little Schuylkill Railroad and hauled coal from Tamaqua to Port Clinton.*

### *Early Coal Transportation*

through Shamokin until they joined. This plan opened the western end of the valley to the Susquehanna Canal and the center of the valley to the Schuylkill Canal.

Girard's major hurdle was crossing the Broad Mountain which divided Schuylkill County. By 1834, using four inclined planes and a 700 foot tunnel, the line was complete to Girardville, then a hamlet of four houses. One of the great incline planes was the Mahanoy Plane. It was 1,625 feet long and 350 feet high.

Montgomery had completed 16 miles by this time and had changed the terminus to Sunbury rather than Danville. The line was completed in 1835 from Sunbury to Shamokin. Soon after, the line was extended to Mt. Carmel. Due to the passing of Montgomery and Girard the line was never extended to Pottsville.

On the Shamokin Sunbury line coal was hauled in two ton cars by horses. The rails were wooden with iron bars as caps. As early as 1837, steam engines were tried, but as in other areas, proved too heavy for the tracks. In 1852, the line was the first to incorporate the new iron "T" rail made by the Danville Iron Company. Steam engines would now prevail thanks to the vision of Daniel Montgomery. This line eventually became part of the Pennsylvania Railroad, while the eastern side became part of the Philadelphia and Reading.

### *The Catawissa Railroad*

Christian Brobst, miller and merchant of Catawissa, is the next visionary to impact coal transportation. Brobst proposed a link from the Susquehanna Canal in Catawissa to the Schuylkill Canal via the Catawissa Creek and the Little Schuylkill River. Their headwaters were only three miles apart, in the heart of coal country.

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His map of 1825 got him elected to the legislature in 1828, where upon he was able to get a professional survey of the route done. Now proposed as a railroad, his route would give direct access to the Schuylkill and the Philadelphia markets.

Brobst persuaded Stephen Girard, Philadelphia capitalist, and Moncure Robinson, engineer, to tour the route with him; they were favorably impressed.

March 31, 1831, the legislature granted a charter to the Little Schuylkill and Susquehanna Railroad. The road was eventually built along the original line that Brobst did in 1825. Construction occurred from 1835 to 1838 when it was halted due to the failure of the Bank of America, Philadelphia. Work was resumed in 1853 under a new name, Catawissa, Williamsport, Erie Railroad. It was not until 1854 that the first train navigated the line to Milton. The line became the Catawissa Railroad in 1860. In 1872, the line became part of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad.

The Catawissa Railroad is also famous in Molly Maguire history. In 1875, during the long strike, undercover Pinkerton agent, James McParlan, tried to incite striking miners to burn down one of the high wooden trestles that the line was famous for. The striking miners were too smart for the agent provocateur, and no one showed up on the arranged night.

### *The Mahanoy Tunnel*

Enter, again, the Little Schuylkill Navigation Company, as the proponent of a tunnel through the Broad Mountain to connect with the eastern end on the Mahanoy Valley. This route could then be used to connect with the Schuylkill Canal. The 4000 foot tunnel, begun in 1859, was completed in 1862 and later taken

### *Early Coal Transportation*

over by the Philadelphia and Reading which helped to solidify the dominance of the coal transportation from Schuylkill County.

Amazing as it may seem, there were no major accidents, nor was a single man hurt during the construction of the tunnel. The major strife on the whole project was the failure of the company to make payment to the contractors, Barry and Bauns, who could not then pay the workers. It took the governor to intervene and make the company pay up.

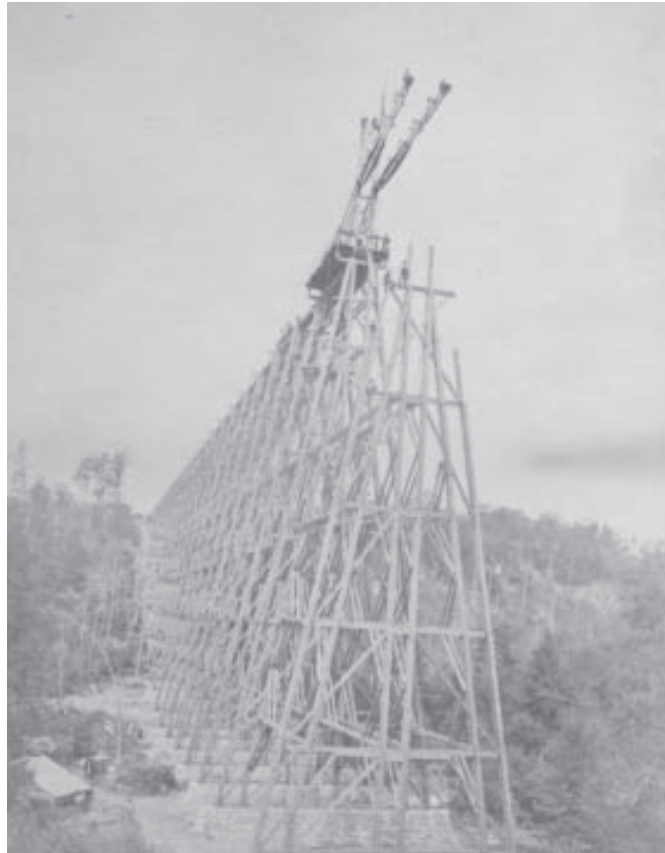
### *Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company*

Granted its charter in 1833, the P&R would one day become the largest company in the world. Moncure Robinson again was the engineer who would devise a route from Port Clinton to Philadelphia. His route was considered by most to be the best, since it allowed for one locomotive to transport many loaded cars with little effort.

In 1871, P&R president, Franklin Gowen, formed the Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company with the intent of providing the raw materials for the P&R to transport. This was when they were the largest company in the world. It was short lived, however, since owning and operating coal mines did not necessarily make the railroad profitable. All the capital spending and lack of profits sent the company into bankruptcy in 1880 and again in 1883. Turmoil followed for many years of receivership, until in 1896, a holding company called the Reading Company was formed.

The P&R ran its first run in 1842, ninety-four miles from Mount Carbon to Philadelphia. The road continued to grow mostly by acquisition, including many of the aforementioned roads.

## Hard Coal Times



*Bridge across the Mainville Gap. One of the famous Catawissa wooden bridges under construction. Photo courtesy of: The Columbia County Historical and Genealogical Society, Bloomsburg, PA*



*The "Hiawatha," an 1856 engine that ran on the P&R.*

*The Northern Fields*

*The Delaware and Hudson*

We now must acknowledge two more visionaries, Maurice and William Wurts. These men had the foresight and will to establish a route from the northern fields to New York.

In 1823, Benjamin Wright, the engineer responsible for the Erie Canal, joined the Wurts brothers and developed a route to New York City. The canal ended at Honesdale, named for Phillip Hone, New York City Mayor and first president of the new canal company. The new canal opened in 1828; it was 108 miles to the Hudson with 108 locks. The only problem was the Moosic Mountain separated Honesdale from the coal in Carbondale.

Wright and his successor, John B. Jervis, engineered a gravity railroad to get the coal to the canal. Using five steam operated incline planes and three gravity planes, they were able to traverse the mountain. This "Gravity" railroad and canal ran until 1898. This is notably the longest running partnership between rail and canal.

The D&H has the distinction of being the first railroad in the United States to run a steam locomotive. On August 28, 1829, Horatio Allen, engineer, boarded the newly acquired "Stourbridge Lion" for its inaugural run of six miles roundtrip to Seelyville. A second run was made on September 9, after which the Lion was removed from the tracks and placed in storage. The engine proved too heavy for the iron capped wooden track.

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### *The Lehigh Valley Railroad*

The Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company transported coal to Philadelphia via its canal from Mauch Chunk, now Jim Thorpe. It was feed by a gravity railroad developed in 1827. This gravity road was not as intricate nor did it achieve the longevity of the D&H gravity line. This line continued to expand and became known as the Mauch Chunk, Summit Hill and Switchback Railroad. In later days, rides were given on the downhill runs making it the precursor to the first roller coaster.

The success of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad in taking coal shipping business from the Schuylkill Canal, served as inspiration to Edward Biddle, who, in 1846, began the Delaware, Lehigh, Schuylkill and Susquehanna Railroad. Obviously, Mr. Biddle was quite an optimist as indicated by the name he chose.

The new line floundered until Asa Packer took control and changed the name to the Lehigh Valley Railroad. In 1853, track construction began on a course that followed the Lehigh River to Easton. The new line joined the Central Railroad of New Jersey and the Belvedere Delaware Railroad opening its markets to New York and Philadelphia.



*1838 P&R Rocket*



*1839 P&R Gowen and Marx*

## *Early Coal Transportation*

Although not an early player in the movement of anthracite, the Lehigh Valley Railroad never forgot its roots and remained a major mover of anthracite coal.

## *Other Pennsylvania Railroads*

Pennsylvania was truly the leader in the development of the railroad. There is no doubt that the nation's growth can be attributed to two main factors, anthracite coal and railroads. The following railroads are mentioned as major contributors to this growth. Although they did eventually haul coal, they were not part of the key early roads that were developed specifically for that purpose.

### *The Philadelphia and Columbia Railroad*

On October 7, 1834, the first train Columbia, on the Susquehanna River, for Philadelphia. This was the first leg of the "Main Line," Philadelphia to Pittsburg." It cost Pennsylvanians millions of dollars, and although never put back into the treasury, it yielded many more millions to the population through trade. In 1846, this line would become the backbone of the newly created Pennsylvania Railroad.

### *The Pennsylvania Railroad*

Known as "The Standard Railroad of the World," the Pennsylvania Railroad was destined to become the world's largest corporation. Chartered by the legislature on April 13, 1846, as a private stock owned venture, Chairman Samuel V. Merrick raised three million dollars to begin construction of the new line.

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The biggest engineering challenge for the new line was traversing the Alleghenies. In 1854, it conquered them with the opening of the famous “Horseshoe Curve” and the Allegheny tunnel. This replaced the Allegheny Portage Railroad.

### *Rail vs. Canal*

As of November 1, 1855, the main line of the Pennsylvania Railroad was finished, and rail service connected Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. The canals of the earlier years were now rendered obsolete. Some canals managed to hang on until the beginning of the twentieth century, but the largest volume of freight and passengers had long since passed to the railroads.

Steam engines continued to improve. In 1926, the famous Baldwin 60000<sup>th</sup> engine was unveiled. This experimental 4-10-2, three cylinder compound engine registered a whopping 4515 horsepower. It served as a demonstrator until 1933, when it was donated to the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia, where it can still be seen.

A new technology fight had now begun. The first diesel engine was introduced in 1925. It produced four times the work from a pound of fuel. The fight continued on through the 1950's, with larger, streamlined steam engines being produced in an attempt to outdo the new rival. But, as railroads proved out over canals, so did diesel over steam. However, for my money, there is nothing more majestic, more exciting, more powerful, or more beautiful than a steam locomotive.

*Early Coal Transportation*



*Top: 1880 Saddleback Bottom: 1883 Saddleback  
Saddleback engines were the first steam engines specifically designed to burn anthracite coal. These two were run on the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad.*



*The mighty Baldwin #60000. This three cylinder demonstrator was eventually donated to the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia, where it can be seen today.*

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### *Who were the Molly Maguires?*

The question of “Who were the Molly Maguires?” is one that has plagued us for over 125 years. In the late 1870’s, 20 Irish men were hanged by a court system run by private enterprise. How could civilized people, ruled by law, let the law be trampled by profit seeking entrepreneurs? Were all twenty men guilty and deserving of death? Were they provoked to act by a devious Pinkerton agent bent on their destruction? What was the role of the Ancient Order of Hibernians? Were the Molly Maguires labor heroes or just terrorists? I hope the following will help you better understand these issues and encourage you to seek out the truth for yourself.

You might wonder why there are still questions. Is the record not clear? Weren’t the Mollies just a bunch of Irish thugs who deserved to die? This work will try to shed some light on all these current issues and give you a simple understanding of why the questions still exist and why we may never know the true answers.

Several years ago, I wrote the book *Molly Justice*. Since that time, I have had many book signings, lectures and classroom visits. Although I wanted to talk about how and why I wrote my book, I was always bogged down by the big question, “Who were the Molly Maguires?” This was always a dilemma for me. I always wanted to answer with, “How much time do you have?” The answer is complex, complex enough to confound scholars even today. I always felt that one or two sentences did not do the question justice. The answer given may apply to one Molly but not the other. The subject is too deep and involved for a quick answer. None-the-less, I shall try to be brief. At one lecture, I managed to go on for two and one half hours without thoroughly exhausting the subject.

*Who were the Molly Maguires?*

I hope when you have finished you feel somewhat better educated on the subject, but ready to read and investigate on your own. Although I feel I have a good general knowledge of the Molly Maguire story, I do not have all the details committed to memory. As I wrote this I had to refer to previously published works to confirm my thoughts and check my dates and names. I credit and recommend Kevin Kenny's book *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, and Patrick Campbell's *A Molly Maguire Story*. You would do well to read both. I also want to credit Katherine Jaeger, for her work *The Molly Maguires of Northumberland County, Pennsylvania*. This is an on line work on the USGENWEB project under Northumberland County history. Over the years, I have read numerous accounts of the Mollies but I did not reference any others for this article. The opinions expressed are my own.

*The Molly Maguires never existed.*

I have a friend that likes to make the statement that the Molly Maguires never existed and then argue the point endlessly. He absolutely insists that the statement is true. When asked to explain his stand he goes on to say there never was an organization who called themselves the Molly Maguires. His statement is most likely true, but misleading, since he much prefers the argument to clearly stating his belief. He might better say, "An organization named the Molly Maguires never existed." This, I would agree with.

OK, what do I mean? If, in fact, no organization called the Molly Maguires ever existed, why all the fuss? Well let's investigate the term first. Benjamin Bannon first used the term "Molly Maguire" in the coal regions, in an 1857 edition of the *Miners Journal*. Mr. Bannon

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subsequently used the term to refer to almost any Irishman implicated in a major crime. He used the term much as today's term "Mafia," some even call the Molly Maguires, the Irish Mafia. Although he popularized the term, it was not used within the Irish community to refer to any viable organization.

Tradition says the term goes back to Ireland when a poor woman named Molly Maguire was evicted by her English landlord for not paying her rent. The local men fought for the widow's cause by dressing as women and striking back with revengeful acts. They called themselves the sons of Molly. The name Molly Maguire stuck, originally meaning someone oppressed, fighting for justice, and striking back against tyranny. Mr. Bannon turned it into a term for terrorism.

As time past, Franklin Gowen, former District Attorney for Schuylkill County, became President of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad. Mr. Gowen was not unlike other leaders of industry in that he needed to produce ever-increasing profits for his stockholders, most of whom resided in England. Gowen soon realized that it would not be enough to transport the coal from Schuylkill County to Philadelphia; he would need to control the supply as well. Corporations were new at that time. Anti-trust laws and other protections did not yet exist. It took an act of the state legislature to grant the P&RR the rights to buy up coalmines and become a coal company as well. Mr. Gowen went on a buying spree, buying up all the mines that he could. He forgot one variable, labor. He set out on a mission to control wages as well as supply and shipping. What he underestimated was the power of a new movement, labor unions. He was instantly plagued by problems with the WBA (Workingman's Benevolent Association.) The WBA was the first successful labor union. John Siney of St. Clair, a small community just north of Pottsville, founded it.

### *Who were the Molly Maguires?*

Siney preached power through peaceful, collective bargaining. This concept was unpalatable to Frank Gowen. Mr. Siney's union needed to be eliminated if he was to have total control of his costs. He came up with a brilliant plan, incorporating Mr. Bannon's term of terror, and equating it to the labor unions. In this way, labor unions would be deemed as evil as the disreputable Molly Maguires. The name of the Molly Maguires was forever associated with the labor movement. The press made it so and Mr. Gowen played it through.

Did the Mollies exist? Twenty men went to the gallows branded with the name. Although they did not call themselves by the name, they would forever be known as the Molly Maguires.

### *So what about the Ancient Order of Hibernians?*

The Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH) was a secret society that traversed the Atlantic in the late 1830's with its first Division in New York City and its second in Pottsville, PA. A benevolent organization, it was founded in Christian charity to serve those who were downtrodden and oppressed. The organization would prove useful to both its members and Allen Pinkerton's Detective Agency. The leadership, in a small four county area of Pennsylvania, used the group for self-gain and managed to direct them into a corrupt, self-serving gathering that no longer had the same values as the national group. Later, this corruption would lead to the dissolving of all the divisions in the four county area. The AOH also provided the vehicle for Pinkerton agent James McParlan, aka James McKenna, to infiltrate, agitate and associate with an already corrupt crowd. Once the decision had been made to act outside the law, it was an easy matter for McParlan to guide them to their demise.

## Hard Coal Times

Their immigration to the United States brought opportunity to the Irish they had not seen in over 700 years of oppression by English landlords. Unfortunately, not all knew how to deal with this new opportunity. They came here poor and oppressed. They were welcomed by Americans (mostly English and Germans), who would be happy to keep them that way. Only meager, low wage work was offered. As the port cities filled, they began to spread out across the country getting work wherever it was available. Some worked on the growing railroad system, some stayed at the port city, some went to mine gold out west and some mined coal in Pennsylvania. No matter where they went, the jobs were hard. If a better job became available, a sign that read, "Irish Need Not Apply," -would most likely meet them.

Soon after the Civil War, the Irish of New York City learned the power of the ballot box. Boss Tweed led Tammany Hall with his unique style of government, and the Irish faired well. If it worked in New York, it could work in Schuylkill County as well. Achieving the office of Bodymaster of the local AOH division was one way of beginning to acquire power. Couple this with a little strong-arming and you are on the way to "power corrupting absolutely." When a member complained of some undue harassment, it became a simple matter to apply some pressure to the offender. Many of the early incidents attributed to the Mollies were of this nature. A mine superintendent might receive a note, which became known as a "coffin notice," that would tell him to reconsider or he might receive a beating. These coffin notices progressed to threats of murder. In addition, there were rival factions to add fuel to the fire. A Welch gang known as the Modocs added their antagonism, especially around Mahanoy City. There were also the Sheet Iron Gang, the Buckshots and others. These groups had to be dealt with if power was to grow.

*Who were the Molly Maguires?*

What an advantageous environment for a wily Pinkerton agent to penetrate. The wheels were already in motion to advance the perverse corruption to the point of meeting his employer's goals. The atmosphere was tense to start. The mineworkers were trying to assert their rights to a fair wage. Frank Gowen opposed their efforts as a major block to his goal of increased profits. Several strikes were held, but nothing of large scale could be organized. We will talk about this in more detail later. Suffice it to say, the region was a powder keg waiting to blow.

Now for the real conspiracy, enter Alan Pinkerton and Franklin Gowen. Mr. Gowen had stuck his neck out when he began buying up all the coal companies that he could get his hands on. Much cash had left his organization to make the purchases. He had to show his stockholders that he could bring in the profit that he promised. His timing was very bad. The Irish population had grown tremendously since the famine immigration. John Siney recognized that with numbers you have strength when he formed the first labor union, the WBA. Siney's union was the real thorn in the side of Frank Gowen. He needed to control the price of coal from mine to distributor if he was to produce his profits. He could not do that if labor was not under control. In itself, the union was not an evil thing. John Siney touted peaceful collective bargaining, a very popular idea based on strength in numbers. How was Gowen to fight this formidable force? How could he make unions unpopular? Unions promised better wages. Gowen wanted to cut them and increase production. The battle lines were drawn.

Gowen was acquainted with Benjamin Bannon and the *Miner's Journal* from his days as district attorney in Schuylkill County. Bannon's Molly Maguires might just be the answer. The power of the press could paint the

## Hard Coal Times

tale of evil and help to associate this evil with the labor movement. A very powerful idea, but he needed more. He needed absolute proof. He contacted Alan Pinkerton. Pinkerton's detectives would provide the proof he needed to defeat the union and give him the freedom he needed to control his costs.

You can think what you want, but I cannot believe that Franklin Gowen, attorney, former DA and now president of the P&RR, would find it necessary to spend a great deal of money to investigate and prosecute a bunch of Irish thugs that, according to a list published by Pinkerton in September 1875, numbered 347. His target was never the AOH or the Molly Maguires; it was always John Siney's WBA. They were a far greater threat to him than a few malcontents were. Why, the Coal and Iron Police could just shoot them and nothing would have come of it. Pinkerton was tasked with linking the union and its activity to the evil Molly Maguires. The union had to be crushed totally.

The now corrupt AOH was the target. Their ambitious leaders would be led down a deceptive trail, which would bring about their end and the end of the union as well. That would be their plan, the only plan that Franklin Gowen would have any interest in paying for.

Now let's look at the time line of the Molly Maguires. Although many more acts were credited to the Mollies, I shall confine the discussion to the murders of ten men, which caused the hanging of twenty. I shall also look at a few other events, which I consider important to the story.

### *A Look at Murder*

Twenty men were hanged as Molly Maguires for the murder of ten men. Five of these murders took place before James McParlan entered the coalfields in Octo-

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ber of 1873. None of these five were near the coal mines that Gowen was buying up. Actually, there was only one that occurred after Gowen began his buying in January of 1871, one year after being elected President of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad. The murder of Morgan Powell at Summit Hill happened in December of 1871.

Before we begin our look at the pre-McParlan murders, it is important to add that many trials did take place but convictions were hard to get. It seems that the alibi was used to help many avoid punishment. Unless caught in the act, it would be impossible to convict most since they would supply a stream of people to say they were elsewhere. You will need to decide if this was one of Gowen's motives to hire the Pinkertons. Did he have an overwhelming need to serve justice? Would he spend corporate profits for this motive?

Were other interests involved? Let's keep looking.

*Frank W. Langdon*

In June of 1862, Frank W. Langdon, mine boss in Audenreid, had given a pro-union speech, attended by many anti-draft Irishmen. One of those present was John Kehoe. Later in the day, Mr. Langdon was beaten by a group of men and died three days later of his injuries. This death was the one that led to the hanging of John Kehoe. It was said that he expressed his displeasure with Langdon's speech by spitting on a flag and saying "You son-of-a-bitch, I'll kill you." Although this was enough to convict the AOH county representative in 1877, it was not enough today. Kehoe was posthumously granted a pardon. Langdon's death indeed was a tragedy. Kehoe's was a travesty.

*George K. Smith*

Back to Audenreid, November of 1863, mine owner,

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George Smith was shot by a group of blackened faced men for providing draft information to the government. James McDonnell and Charles Sharp were subsequently hanged for his death. Three others were also killed that night which also happened to be “Guy Fawkes Night,” a British celebration of their most famous traitor. They dress in costume, set bonfires and burn effigies to commemorate the night disgruntled Catholics tried to bomb Parliament. It is not clear if they are celebrating the torture and death of Guy Fawkes or the attempt to blow up the government.

Sharp and McDonnell were tried after the 1876 high profile trials. The Pinkertons kept their freight train running by digging up all they could on unsolved murders under the guise of cleaning up the pervasive evil influence. In this case, an informer, Charles Mulhearn, identified all the black faced men, many of whom were never apprehended.

### *Alexander Rae*

Now let's go west to Centralia in southern Columbia County. Alexander Rae was a mine superintendent for the Locust Mountain Colliery. On October 17, 1868, a group of men, intent on robbing the colliery payroll confronted him. Unfortunately, he did not have the payroll, but the robbers had been careless and had not hid their identity. They shot and killed him to avoid identification. The Rae trial is important since it was used to hang yet another AOH leader, Patrick Hestor. It took two arrests to get Hestor, the so-called leader of the Northumberland county Molly Maguires. The first trial in 1869 acquitted Thomas Donohue, John Duffy, and Michael Pryor. Hestor avoided his trial since the district attorney felt a conviction was unlikely. It wasn't until the Pinkertons unleashed their attack in Carbon and Schuylkill counties that Columbia county jumped on the

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band wagon.

February, 1877, on the testimony of convicted felon, Daniel Kelly, aka. Kelly the bum, Patrick Hestor, Peter McHugh and Patrick Tully were convicted of murder and later hanged. Kelly claimed to be an accomplice to the murder. He was never prosecuted. To this day, Kelly's testimony is in question. Did he implicate others to avoid the rope himself?

*Patrick Burns*

The Silver Creek Colliery in Tuscarora is the site of the next murder. Again the testimony of an informer exposed by James McParlan's incursion into the AOH convicted Martin Bergin of the April 15, 1870, murder of mine foreman Patrick Burns. James McDonnell, the informer, claimed that John Kane, a mine boss under Burns, had been caught robbing the company. Kane asked McDonnell to appoint someone to kill Burns for him. McDonnell had Bergin kill Burns. Kane disappeared.

This story sounds like the M.O. of the Mollies. Revenge for a fellow member taken by a disinterested party. The Mt. Laffee AOH was implicated in this murder. I would say that this murder is the first that fits with the corruption that occurred in the AOH of the region. If this is true, then it was fuel for the fire of an anxious detective.

*Morgan Powell*

This is the last of our pre-McParlan murders. It's now December 2, 1871, Morgan Powell, a Welsh miner now supervisor, is murdered as revenge for not giving Alexander Campbell a coal face to mine. Instead, he gave it to a fellow Welshman. Once again, the Pinkertons capitalize on their courtroom successes by digging up old unsolved murders. Patrick Breslin and Patrick Gildea

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were arrested in 1871. Gildea was found not guilty and Breslin was released. It was only after the convictions of the perpetrators of John P. Jones murder that they moved on the Powell case again. Jones was Powell's successor. Campbell had already been convicted in the Jones murder but the Powell prosecutions netted the Pinkertons two more leaders; John "Yellow Jack" Donahue, Bodymaster at Tuscarora, Thomas Fisher, AOH county delegate for Carbon County. Alexander Campbell was Bodymaster at Storm Hill.

This story is not much different from the Burns story above. The corruption in the AOH leads to stepping over the line and ordering murder as revenge.

### *Pinkerton McParlan Arrives*

It was not until October, 1873, that James McParlan entered the coal region as James McKenna. Why the delay? What was happening that took almost two years to move Frank Gowen to hire Allan Pinkerton's detectives?

Franklin B. Gowen took over the reins at the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad in January of 1870. He was under a great deal of pressure to increase the profit of his English stockholders. Faced with the uncertainties in the supply of coal, he searched for other ways to ensure an uninterrupted supply. Eighteen Seventy also brought the mine safety law because of the Avondale disaster where 110 were killed. Lastly, in January of 1871, the anthracite region was shut down by a strike. He had to act. He began by buying up coal land secretly. This way he controlled the supply and the transportation. He could set the wholesale price of coal. The profits would flow.

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Things quieted down as far as Molly Maguire activity was concerned. Nothing, other than minor spats and skirmishes occurs until after McParlan enters the picture. Things got quiet partly because of the successes of the WBA. The collective bargaining voice was beginning to be heard and John Siney, founder and president of the WBA would be part of it. In 1873, John Siney moves on to become the president of the Miner's National Association, a collection of local miner's unions with its headquarters in Cleveland. Eighteen Seventy-three also brings an economic depression and with it wage uncertainty; sure to be a test of the new union.

Let's get back to Gowen's motives. In the middle of 1873, Frank Gowen and Allan Pinkerton were laying the plans that would ensure a stable supply of coal to the trains of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad. Since the Molly Maguires were quiet and collective bargaining was flexing its muscles there needed to be new acts of violence that could be associated with both. They had to make a passive, non-violent union guilty by association. They had to be able to say, "See what happens when labor is not controlled. No one works and all suffer, company and worker alike. You must eliminate the evil doers from your midst."

Let's think about this one more time. Gowen takes the P&RR presidency in 1870 and begins buying up coal land in 1871. There are only two high profile murders, Burns and Powell, he may possibly been interested in the Burns murder but certainly not Powell. The only thing going on of major consequence is the levelheaded activities of the WBA. In mid 1873, his only motive is fighting the union activity by associating it with the bad reputation, established by the press, of the Molly Maguires. Was there ethnic fighting? Of course there was. Was this fighting a threat to keeping the coal in the boxcars of the P&RR? Certainly not. He could have

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easily taken care of the “Irish” problem by giving a few leaders a prime coalface to mine or making them supervisors. Either would be a much easier solution but neither would help to eliminate the union. No, he had to make people think the union was evil, as evil as the Molly Maguires.

### *Things heat up.*

OK, so where does that leave us? McParlan, now under the name, McKenna, is initiated into the AOH in Shenandoah. It’s April, 1874. He spends the next several months being accepted and building his reputation as a radical, inside and outside of the organization. The economic situation continues to worsen putting more pressure on Gowen for profits. The next murder of significance is that of George Major, Chief Burgess of Mahanoy City. Although Major’s murderer was never apprehended, it did serve as a catalyst for future events, events that our Pinkerton agent could easily have influenced.

If you want to explore these Mahanoy City events, I invite you to read my book, “Molly Justice.” Although historical fiction, it is true to the events of the Molly Maguires.

On the evening of October 31, 1874, a riot occurred between the two rival fire companies in Mahanoy City. George Major responded with pistol drawn to help bring about order. Many shots were exchanged, ending in George Major’s death. One of the wounded, Daniel Dougherty, was arrested and prosecuted for the Major murder. Dougherty’s trial was moved to neighboring Lebanon County to obtain a fair trial. During the trial, a bullet was removed from Dougherty’s neck. The prosecution purported that the bullet was from Major’s gun. It proved to be of a different caliber and Daniel Dougherty

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was acquitted. The real murderer, John McCann, fled back to Ireland.

It is highly unlikely that McKenna had any influence on this murder. It was what happened later that is suspect.

In May of 1875, Daniel Dougherty was shot at in downtown Mahanoy City by Jess and Will Major, George's brothers, and Bully Bill Thomas, alleged members of the Modocs, a rival Welsh gang. Before I go on with this story, I want to step back and go over one more murder from 1874.

*Frederick Hesser*

December 18, 1874, night watchman and coroner, Frederick Hesser, was found beaten to death at the Hickory Swamp Colliery. Peter McManus, Shamokin Bodymaster, was hanged as a result of his conviction by another informant, Dennis Canning, the AOH County Delegate for Northumberland County. It was said that Hesser was murdered for testifying against AOH member Thomas Gribbons. Again, McKenna would have had no influence on this murder, and Gowen would have had no interest.

*McKenna Stirs the Coals*

June 1, 1875, John Kehoe has been the county delegate for 10 months, and James McKenna has been an AOH member for 14 months. As we saw above, there have been two key murders, unlikely that McKenna aggravated either. What we do have at this time is the "Long Strike of 1875" and a very uneasy Frank Gowen. He has a man in the field with no significant result for his 14 months of invoicing. The strike had started December of 1874. Although violent acts did happen, it

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was relatively peaceful, just as John Siney taught. In April, a meeting between Allan Pinkerton; Benjamin Franklin, Pinkerton supervisor; and Frank Gowen occurred in Philadelphia to discuss the strike. They decided that Pinkerton detectives should pose as Coal and Iron Police. Pinkerton appointed Captain Robert Linden to lead the new "Flying Squadron." The squadron would be tasked with ending the strike. After five months, the miners were virtually starved out anyway. Gowen feared that hungry men are desperate men and expected an increase in violence. He needed evidence to defeat the union once and for all. He would push his agent to act.

Captain Linden entered the coalfields in May and met with agent McParlan. One can only speculate what was actually said. I would venture a guess that Gowen too was a desperate man and pressed for action. His bills were mounting, and the coal was not leaving the mines.

Now back to Mahanoy City. Kehoe calls a meeting to hear Dan Dougherty's complaint about the Modoc's attempt on his life. Dougherty claims three men were involved, Jess Major, Will Major and Bully Bill Thomas. Dougherty fears for his life and wants action. Here's where the story gets blurry. Our intrepid agent, now trusted AOH member, is at the meeting. He has put a great deal of effort into convincing Irish and Welsh that he is a half-crazed, angry radical. He pushes for execution. The meeting is angry, emotions are peaked, and all agree to McKenna's suggestion. How much convincing did he need to do? Everyone was caught up in the moment. Would cooler heads prevail? No, Gowen would have his evidence.

Kehoe accepted the task of taking care of Thomas. The Major brothers were currently working in Tuscarora.

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John Donahue and Schuylkill County Treasurer, Chris Donnelly were tasked with the that job. The Major job was botched after they were tipped off and fled. The Thomas job was botched as well, not once but twice. On June 4, Agent McParlan led Thomas Hurley, Michael Doyle, and John Gibbons to kill Thomas. McParlan called the job off when he got to Mahanoy City only to find the State Militia, who was brought in to counter a union march from Shenandoah to Mahanoy City. On June 28, Hurley, Gibbons and John Morris return to kill Thomas. Thomas, shot several times, survives. Gowen does not get his murder. This incident will later send many to jail and reveal even more about the corruption within the AOH as more members turn state's evidence.

*Benjamin F. Yost*

AOH member James Kerrigan has several run-ins with Tamaqua police officer Benjamin Yost. He appeals to the division to help with the problem. The resulting murder is considered a pivotal event in the demise of the Molly Maguires, for it was the beginning of the organization of "Vigilance Committees" throughout the region. Endorsed by the Tamaqua Courier and the Shenandoah Herald, the committees began their activity, further aggravating already desperate men. It is now July 6, 1875.

Agent McParlan journeys to Tamaqua to investigate the Yost murder. It is unlikely that he provoked the act, but his subsequent testimony was enough to convict five men. James Boyle, James Carroll, Thomas Duffy, Hugh McGehan, and James Roarity were all hanged for Yost's death.

McKenna also uncovers a plot to kill John P. Jones, successor to Morgan Powell. It is in this plot where our undercover agent is able to exert his influence. McKenna reports the conspiracy to Captain Linden, and Jones has men assigned to him for protection. I'll have more on

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Jones a little later.

### *Thomas Sanger and William Uren*

Raven Run, north of Girardville, is the site of our next murder. It was September 1. The union had been defeated months earlier and the miners were forced back to work at reduced wages. Gowen and the other coal operators had managed to starve out the miners. The only ones left to fight were the Mollies. Thomas Sanger was a mine boss who had already received several coffin notices, presumably for his actions against the mineworkers. William Uren was a boarder at Sanger's home and accompanied him to work that fateful morning. James McParlan aka McKenna had known about the plot to kill Sanger and had even named his assailants in a dispatch he made days before. Why was Sanger not warned? Gowen had no more need of murder. The union was defeated. But, Allan Pinkerton was building a business. His investigation was over a year old, and he needed convictions to make it payoff big. Again, the Mollies provide what he needed. Did McKenna provide a few words of encouragement? One can only guess.

### *John P. Jones*

This is the final assault, the last step the Mollies would take. What started out as a few well-placed beatings in an attempt to eliminate mistreatment by prejudiced mine bosses had become a willingness to murder. Did the undercover Pinkerton agent provoke murder, or would it have happened anyway with the collapse of the union? In either case, events accelerated after the failure of the strike. They all felt the bitterness of defeat. It was only the Mollies that had any fight left, and soon they would be brought down.

Hugh McGehan, participant in the Yost murder, now wanted his revenge against Jones to compensate for his

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anti-Irish prejudice. So, using the tit-for-tat system that the divisions had established, McGehan now calls on the Tamaqua division for help. James McParlan steps forward to volunteer along with Michael Darcy, James McGrail and Thomas Munley. He manages to get the job postponed several times. However, two nights after the Sanger and Uren murder, James Kerrigan, Michael Doyle and Edward Kelly set off to do the deed. They were captured by a posse shortly after and held at the Mauch Chunk jail. It was here that Kerrigan turned states evidence, and his testimony would be responsible for hanging many men. It's interesting to note that Kerrigan's wife later called him a liar, and she accused him of murdering Jones.

Oh, what happened to the bodyguards that Jones had for the past month? They were relieved of duty two days before the murder. Imagine that.

### *The End of the Molly Maguires*

The Molly trials were followed widely. Franklin Gowen took such pride in the result that he could not help but participate in the prosecution. The prosecution, which hinged on the testimony of informers who, in order to save their own necks, would implicate the Pope, if need be. In addition, many jurors spoke no English. This, along with an undercover agent who would participate in murderous deeds rather than save the victim, would provide for a low point in the United States judicial system.

Gowen never did get his link with labor. The unions had maintained their stance on non-violent strikes with the right to collective bargaining. Soon, as the Industrial Revolution grew, the labor movement would arrive, strong and healthy, ready to tame those who would op-

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press them for the sake of profit. Allan Pinkerton was successful. His agency went on to become noted for its strikebreaking prowess and participated in breaking strikes throughout the nation. Gowen, on the other hand, failed miserably. In 1880, the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad went into receivership, and unhappy stockholders dismiss Gowen. Nine years later Franklin B. Gowen is found dead in his Washington, D. C. hotel room. The conclusion was suicide, but was it? I invite you to read Patrick Campbell's book "Who Killed Franklin Gowen?"

### *The Day of the Rope*

June 21, 1877, the largest mass execution this country has ever seen, took place in two small counties of Pennsylvania. In the county jail at Mauch Chunk, the warden erected a four-person gallows in the middle of the cellblock where he would hang the infamous Molly Maguires. On that morning, Alexander Campbell, Edward Kelly, John Donohue, and Michael Doyle were hanged for their roles in the Powell and Johns murders. In nearby Pottsville, Schuylkill County, they took a more humane view of things and tried not to create a circus as his Carbon County counterpart did. Nevertheless, six more men meet their deaths; James Boyle, James Carroll, Thomas Duffy, Hugh McGeehan and James Roarity for the Yost murder and Thomas Munley for the Sanger and Uren murders.

In the following months, ten more men would meet their fate. Patrick Hester, Peter McHugh and Patrick Tully were hanged in another circus-like environment in Bloomsburg for their part in the Alexander Rea murder. Thomas Fisher was hanged at Mauch Chunk for the Morgan Powell murder, and James McDonnell and Charles Sharpe were hanged for the George Smith murder. Also for the Sanger and Uren murder, Dennis

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Donnelly was hanged at Pottsville, and John Kehoe was hanged for the Frank Langdon murder. In Sunbury, Northumberland County, Peter McManus was hanged for the Frederick Hesser killing. Martin Berger was hanged at Pottsville for the Patrick Burns murder.

The Ancient Order of Hibernians in Northumberland, Schuylkill, Carbon, and Columbia counties had certainly been corrupted by their agreement to trade deeds as a means of retribution for its members. But, one can't help but wonder how far this would have gone if they were not pushed. They were pushed from all sides, mine bosses with prejudicial practices, owners with profit motive, an evolving Industrial age, Pinkertons, unions, ambitious corporate officers, all with greed in their hearts. A benevolent organization, with a strong motive to help others through Christian charity, was almost torn apart by the acts of a few. A few, who took their first step innocently enough, thinking they were helping their fellow members, were caught up in a spiral of corruption. They fought the only way they knew, conditioned by centuries of oppression. The men who were hanged were no different from you or me. They were men, trying their best to survive. Would we act the same? Would we have the courage to stand up to our oppressors? There are many lessons to be learned from the Mollies. My hope is that you will continue to study them. Ask the questions for yourself, and learn from the answers you find. Only then will you find out who the Molly Maguires were.



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### *Coal Miners' Wish*

On a dark ocean green,  
wind filling the sails,  
I sailed on ahead,  
seeking my dream.

It's Wales I hail from,  
beautiful and grande.  
Came seeking new life,  
In a far away land.

Pennsylvania is rich,  
With the black rocks, you see.  
Lush, green, and free,  
it's there that I'll be.

For a miner I am,  
I work long hard days.  
Digging the rocks,  
that will soon pave the way.

Refrain:

The famine had come,  
and brought with it death.  
For me and my son,  
it was time for a breath.

Freedom I sought,  
a new life for he.  
With Ireland behind,  
we crossed the great sea.

Good honest work,  
is all that we sought.  
Instead persecution, bigotry,  
and prejudice we fought.

Time's all we need.  
to prove what we're worth,  
We'll sweat and we'll bleed,  
to bring a rebirth.

Refrain:

From Poland, Lithuania,  
and the Ukraine we came.  
A better life for all,  
that was our aim.

We would work in the coalmines,  
for meagerly pay.  
We would scratch out a living,  
have some fun on the way.

We all were coal miners,  
we all became one.  
Struggled and toiled,  
in the task we'd begun.

We formed our coal unions,  
equality for all.  
If in them we wavered,  
we'd all take the fall.

Refrain:

It's all for the future,  
it's all I can see.  
For I still have nothing,  
But, they're counting on me.

I hope what we've given,  
Will be just enough.  
Old, tired, and battered,  
it's been awfully tough.

For our sons and our daughters,  
we would sacrifice all.  
From the depths of the earth,  
they would all hear our call.

Someday they will prosper,  
in the land of the free.  
Our dream will be realized,  
will they remember me?

Refrain:

*Refrain:  
Anthracite, Anthracite,  
it's king of all coal.  
We mine it and burn it,  
it's deep in our soul.*