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INDIANA COUNTY
HISTORICAL-GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

INDIANA, PENNA. **Harry White**
General, Senator, Judge, and Master of Croylands

WILLIAM W. HASSLER

For a Judge of Indiana County to bear on his arms the teeth marks of bloodhounds employed to track down escaped prisoners doubtless strikes the reader as incongruous and unusual. But then Harry White was a most unusual person. In fact, his long and eventful career probably is unsurpassed in local annals with respect to versatility, public service, and sheer drama.

Harry White, the fourth and youngest child of Thomas and Catherine White, was born in Indiana in 1834. His father was the distinguished Judge of the 10th Pennsylvania District whose only fault, according to a lawyer friend, was that "I sometimes thought he leaned a little against me in a trial lest it would be thought that his friendship affected his fairness and impartiality on the bench."

Young Harry received his early education at Indiana Academy and from private tutors. In 1850 he entered the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) which awarded him his degree in 1854. Although he desired to go south with one of his classmates and teach school, he yielded to his father's request to return to Indiana and begin the study of law. After serving a two-year apprenticeship in his father's law office, Harry passed the bar examinations administered by a special committee of three lawyers. Characteristically, he assisted in the trial of a case the day following his admission to the bar.

The same year, 1856, that Harry White began practicing law, the Republican party emerged as a power in national politics. Despite the fact that this was the first national election in which the 22 year old barrister voted, he became so actively engrossed in the new party's anti-slavery stand that he was named the first Chairman of the Republican party in Indiana County. He made his maiden political speech in Blairsville which he followed up with such a vigorous campaign that Fremont,

the Republican Presidential candidate, swept the County by a whopping majority.

Assured of a bright future, Harry White in 1860 married the lovely Anna Lena Sutton whose family occupies a prominent position in Indiana County. She bore him two daughters and two sons.

Lawyer White's political zeal and prowess were noted by party leaders who marked him as a comer in the party. In 1859-60 he entered local politics by getting himself elected to the Indiana Borough Council. However, the outbreak of the Civil War interrupted White's rising political star for four years. Organizing a company which elected him Captain, he tendered the unit to Governor Curtin who politely rejected it. When Captain White inquired why the Governor had not accepted his offer, Curtin replied: "I did not accept you because of the request of your father. You know, Harry, how highly I esteem your father, and with tears in his eyes he besought me not to accept you for service as you were all he had at home." (Harry's sister, Juliet, had died in 1853 and his two older brothers, Richard and Alexander, had left Indiana.)

After cogitating a moment on the Governor's explanation, Harry replied: "I am sorry to distrust my father, but I feel it my duty to go into the service and I am going, if I have to carry a musket." Sensing White's firm resolve, the Governor rejoined. "If that is the way of it I will commission you as Major of the 67th Regiment, which is struggling in recruiting at Cammacks Woods at Philadelphia."

Upon receiving his commission, Major White proceeded to recruit and organize his regiment which went into active service during the early part of 1862. For a while the regiment was detailed to protect the railroads around Washing-

ton, after which it was sent to Harper's Ferry and Berryville which commanded the approaches to Virginia's lush Shenandoah Valley, "Breadbasket of the Confederacy."

While White was thus serving with the Union Army in Virginia, the voters of his senatorial district, which then comprised Indiana and Armstrong Counties, elected him to the Senate of Pennsylvania. President Lincoln granted the Major a leave of absence to attend the legislative session which convened in January, 1863. During the ensuing months, he occasionally slipped away to visit his troops, and he turned over his entire Senate salary to the Soldiers' Relief Fund of Armstrong and Indiana Counties.

In the spring of 1863, he rejoined his regiment just before General Lee began his northern invasion which culminated in the battle of Gettysburg. White force marched his regiment to Winchester to reinforce General Milroy whose division was crushed and swept aside by the advance of General Richard Ewell's corps as it surged toward Pennsylvania. In this decisive engagement the redoubtable 9th Louisiana Tigers captured Major White.

At this stage of the war, the combatants had discontinued the practice of exchanging prisoners. Hence Major White was incarcerated at Libby Prison in Richmond. Here he languished until the fall of 1863 when an agreement was reached for the exchange of surgeons. Seeing in this ruling an opportunity to escape, White disguised himself as a surgeon and was taken aboard a flag-of-truce steamer which sailed down the James River toward City Point where the exchange was to be effected. As the boat neared its destination, the Confederate commissioner in charge of the exchange received word that Major White was aboard disguised as a surgeon. Thereupon he ordered the prisoners to line up and demand that Major White "come forth." The Major manfully complied without hesitation, but contended that he had a right to employ any stratagem to escape. The Con-

federate commission did not dispute this point, but nevertheless returned his charge to Libby where he was confined in a dungeon until Christmas. Then he was transferred to the prison at Salisbury, North Carolina where he was placed in solitary confinement for the remainder of the winter.

The severe treatment meted Major White was occasioned partly by his effort to escape and partly by a political situation. The latter centered around the equal division of the Pennsylvania Senate into "hawks" and "doves" with respect to the prosecution of the war. As White was an avowed "hawk", the Confederate government resorted to extreme measures to bar his escape or exchange even though the Federal government offered a captured Confederate Major General and several officers of lesser rank in return for the Indianian.

During the spring and summer of 1864, several attempts were made to move White to notorious Andersonville Prison in Georgia, but each time he managed to escape only to be recaptured. On his last escapade the Major was recaptured after 29 days by vicious bloodhounds which left deep teeth scars on his arm. In September, after 16 months of debilitating imprisonment, Major White finally rejoined the Union Army near Atlanta by using a ruse to get out of prison and joining a group of prisoners who were being exchanged after the Atlanta campaign.

After serving briefly with General George Thomas in the Nashville campaign, Major White returned home, reaching Indiana on the night of October 5, 1864. He quickly regained his normal vigor and early in November he attended a reception in his honor at the Academy of Music in Philadelphia. Governor Curtin, the master of ceremonies on this felicitous occasion, called on the hero from Indiana to recount his harrowing experiences.

In the waning months of the war, Governor Curtin commissioned Harry White Colonel of the 67th Regiment, and upon his discharge, President

Lincoln brevetted him a Brigadier General.

Returning to Indiana after Appomattox, General White zestfully re-entered the political arena. Beginning in 1865 he served in the State Senate until 1874 at an annual salary of \$1,000. As party leader in the Senate, he sponsored a number of important measures including the Evidence Act of 1869 which permitted interested parties to testify on their own behalf in court cases. He also spearheaded the drive for a Constitutional Convention which met in 1872-73 to reform and up-date the State Constitution.

Among Senator White's major legislative achievements was the framing and passage in 1871 of an act which chartered and appropriated \$20,000 to establish the State Normal School at Indiana. This grant provided the stimulus and encouragement needed to proceed with plans to purchase land and construct buildings. For this new educational enterprise, the Senator personally lent his support to the project by attending the meeting in County Superintendent J. T. Gibson's office at which the Normal School Association was formed. Subsequently, he generously subscribed to stock in the school and served on the Board of Trustees for over 40 years.

About this time Senator White built Croylands, a commodious 13-room gabled, frame house. Erected for \$6,000 on land which had belonged to White's father, Croylands became a prominent landmark which the Historical Society appropriately has acquired as a repository and tourist site.

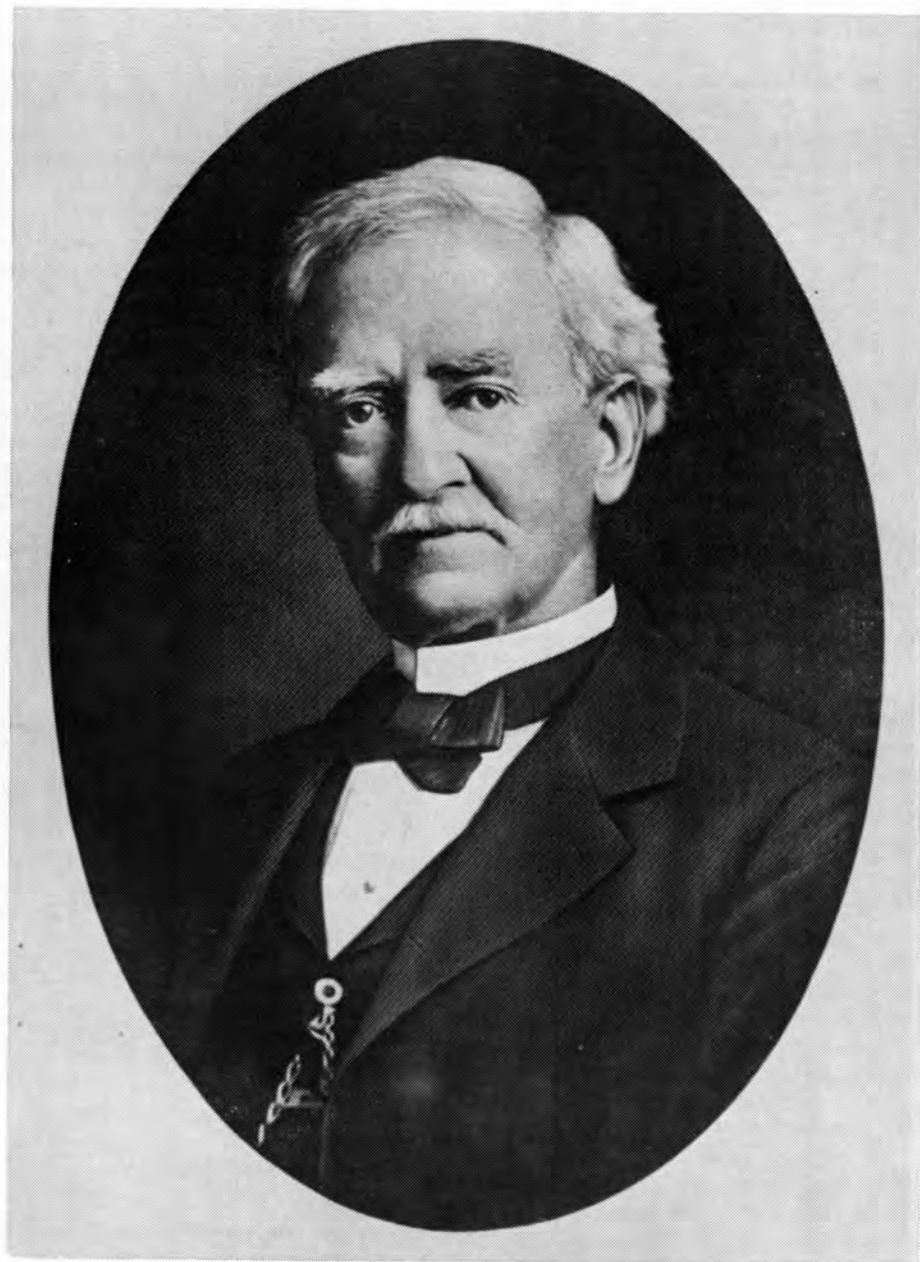
In 1872 Senator White became a candidate for Governor but lacking machine support he lost the nomination to General Hartranft. Four years later White was elected Congressman-at-Large from the district encompassing Armstrong, Clarion, Forest, Indiana, and Jefferson Counties. Shortly after assuming his seat in the 45th Congress, White was appointed a "visiting statesman" to assist in the arbitration of the Hayes-Tilden election.

In Washington, Congressman White secured an appropriation for the improvement of the upper Allegheny River designed to make it navigable during all seasons. He also served on the Burnside Military Commission which revamped the organization of the U. S. Army. During his first term, he vigorously espoused a Constitutional amendment which would provide for the popular election of U. S. Senators at the polls, but in this he was 30 years ahead of his time.

At the age of 50 Harry White departed the national and state legislatures to run for president judge of his judicial district which covered Indiana County. He served in this post with distinction from 1884 to 1905. His tenure was marked by a series of controversial decisions involving the granting of liquor licenses. As state Senator he had authored a law whereby the court received, heard, and passed on license applications. Upon ascending to the bench, Judge White adopted the policy of deciding each case on the basis of the petitions which were filed for and against the granting of a liquor license. The result was that he granted no such licenses during his first ten-year term, and consequently, Indiana County was without a hotel licensed to sell alcoholic beverages.

The liquor interests retaliated by organizing the opposition to Judge White's re-election, and they almost succeeded. After winning the contested election by less than 100 votes, Judge White responded to the sentiment expressed by the voters and henceforth approved a number of liquor license applications.

Judge White left the bench in 1905 to resume, after a long interval, his successful law practice and to engage in numerous business and civic activities. As the largest individual landowner in the county, he frequently inspected his 1,000-acre domain astride his dark mount, Croylands. His spare figure also was a familiar sight in town where he served as president of the Indiana County Deposit Bank (now the site of Uber's



Harry White

Music Store) which his father had helped organize. He was first Master of the Indiana Masonic Lodge No. 313 and served as Commander of the G.A.R. in Indiana.

On the morning of June 23, 1920,

Harry White died at Croylands and was buried in Oakland Cemetery. His 86-year career, which bridged two centuries, constitutes a proud and notable chapter in the history of Indiana County.