

The Pennsylvania House of Representatives

Archives

Fall 2023



Go West, Young Man!

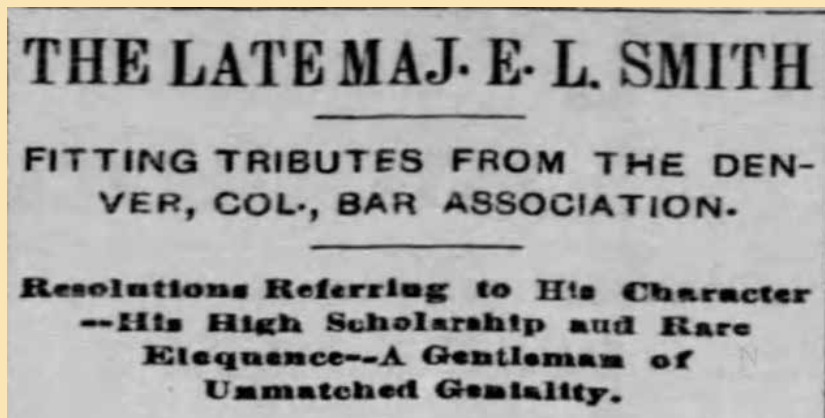


Throughout the House Archives research, we have found many former House Members who served in the mid 19th century and then relocated to the United States western territories to continue their political careers. These Pennsylvania men contributed to the founding of the American Frontier, and participated in the expansion of democracy.

Edmond L. Smith

Representative, Berks County, 1858-1859
Colorado Territorial Assembly, First District
January 3, 1876 – February 11, 1876

Representative Smith graduated from Georgetown University and studied law prior to his service in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. Upon the outbreak of the Civil War, Smith enlisted and served as a first lieutenant in Company C, 25th Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, and later served as a corporal in Company H, 55th Regiment, Pennsylvania Emergency Militia. He ended his military career as a major in Company G, 19th Infantry, United States Union Army. During his service, he was captured by Confederate troops and imprisoned in Libby Prison, Richmond, Virginia. He escaped via tunnel, but was soon recaptured. He was later paroled and exchanged after a chance encounter with Major Deslonde of the Confederate Army — who happened to be a Georgetown classmate. Following his years of military service, Smith joined his brother in a law practice in the Colorado Territory. He was elected to the final Colorado Territorial Assembly in 1875. Colorado became the 38th state on August 1, 1876. After living and working in Colorado for more than 20 years, Smith passed away in Berks County, Pennsylvania in 1891.



Reading Times, Reading, Pennsylvania, September 21, 1891



Smith in his later years.

Going West Continued

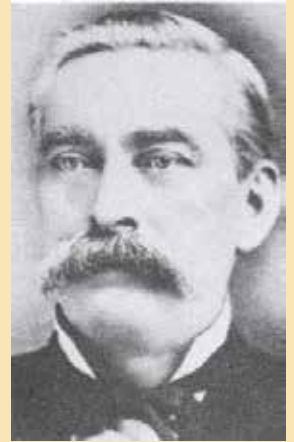
Peter C. Shannon

Representative, Allegheny County, 1862-1863

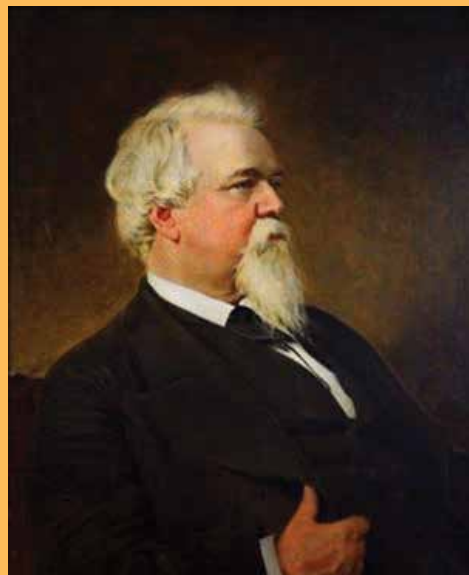
Chief Justice, Supreme Court of the Dakota Territory, 1873 – 1881

Peter C. Shannon was an attorney and served as a president judge in Allegheny County. Following his House service, he was a lieutenant colonel in the 117th Regiment, 13th Pennsylvania Volunteer Cavalry during the Civil War. President Ulysses S. Grant appointed Shannon Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Dakota Territory. Shannon County in South Dakota was named for him, but was renamed Oglala Lakota County in 2015 to reflect the heritage of the indigenous people of the region.

The Yaukton Press says the supreme court of Dakota now consists of four judges, to-wit: P. C. Shannon, chief justice, appointed from Pennsylvania; A. H. Barnes, appointed from Wisconsin; G. C. Moody and J. P. Kidder, appointed from Dakota, associate justices. In legal ability, good looks and integrity the bench of Dakota is equal, if not ahead, of any other bench in the west.



The Daily Deadwood Pioneer-Times, Deadwood, South Dakota, May 20, 1879



Obadiah B. McFadden

Representative, Washington County, 1844

Associate Justice, Territory of Oregon Supreme Court, 1853-1854

Associate Justice, Territory of Washington Supreme Court, 1854-1861

President, Washington Legislature Council Chamber, 1861-1864

Congressional Delegate, Washington Territory, 1873-1875

Obadiah B. McFadden was an attorney, and in addition to his House service, fulfilled several local government roles in Washington County, Pennsylvania. President Franklin Pierce appointed McFadden to serve as the Associate Justice of the Territory of Oregon Supreme Court. The following year he was appointed to the Washington Supreme Court after the creation of the Washington Territory. McFadden served in the United States Army from 1855 to 1856 in the Yakima War — a conflict in the Washington Territory with the Yakima, who are an indigenous people from the Pacific Northwest. He was elected to the Washington Legislature Council Chamber (similar to a state Senate), and eventually served the Washington Territory in Congress as a delegate.

Washington State Bar Association Portrait of Justice McFadden

Right: The O. B. McFadden House in Chehalis, Washington, was built in 1859 as a one and a half story log cabin. McFadden lived in this house while serving as the Washington Legislature's Council Chamber President until his election as a congressional delegate. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1975. It is the oldest continually occupied house in Washington State.

Photograph by Jon Roanhaus



Member Feature: Wade H. Mervine: “Christmas Tree King”

Wade H. Mervine, a Representative from Monroe County for the 1917-1918 session, was the proprietor of a saw mill and lumber company. In addition to his primary business and brief legislative career, Mervine built a reputation for his endeavors to bring quality Christmas trees to families throughout the region. Alongside his father and brothers, Mervine would assemble teams of men to travel to Canada and New England to harvest trees. Often employing farmers who were happy to have work in the off season, they would cut and ship upwards of 80 rail cars full of balsam and spruce trees. The business often proved risky as inclement weather slowed tree harvesting and trips could end up costing more than tree sales would earn. The family eventually had their own tree farm in Monroe County.

The first delegation of Monroe county men went to the Northwoods today to start cutting Christmas trees. It is believed that more men go from this county annually to cut Christmas trees than from any other county of its size in the United States, and one of these, Hon. W. H. Mervine, has been called the “Christmas Tree King” of the United States.

The Tribune

Scranton, Pennsylvania, September 29, 1922



Start For Christmas Trees.
Stroudsburg, Pa., Sept. 29.—The first Monroe county Christmas tree cutting gang left for Canada, where active operations will be started as quickly as possible. Five automobile loads, containing thirty-five men, left in charge of Wade Mervine.

The Plain Speaker

Hazleton, Pennsylvania, September 29, 1922

Left: The Morning Call, Allentown, Pennsylvania, December 23, 1942

Pictured: Tree harvesters and Representative Mervine's brother, Burton, on their family tree farm.



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Exciting Acquisition!

The House Archives recently acquired this panoramic photograph taken on January 2, 1923. This date is significant to the history of the House of Representatives, as it marks the swearing-in of the first eight women elected to the legislature. Seven of the eight women can be seen at their desks. This photograph was taken during a Joint Session with the Senate held for Governor William C. Sproul's farewell address later the same day. The Archives has many panoramic photographs of Members on the House Floor, but this is now our oldest image of Members seated at their desks.



Be sure to stop by the 6th floor of the Irvis Office Building to see this amazing photograph when you have a chance!

