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Mineral City man's prowess included industry, press, politics

By **JON BAKER**, T-R Editorial Page Editor

When industrialist Charles Edward Holden first arrived in Mineral City on Christmas Day 1864, the fledgling community had just three houses.

By the time he retired to Canton in 1911, Holden had transformed his adopted hometown into one of the thriving manufacturing centers of Tuscarawas County, with a population of 1,500.

His holdings in Mineral City included coal mines, a sewer pipe plant, a newspaper, a bank, a department store, a drug store and a hotel.

Holden was born July 23, 1829, at New Haven, Conn. As a young man, he worked in the composing room of the Ithaca, N.Y., Journal, earning the princely sum of \$30 a year. To supplement his income, he wrote doggerel verse for the opposition paper, the Chronicle, receiving \$5 per poem. The editor's son got credit for writing them.

"I did not care, as long as I got the money for it, who got the credit," Holden later told a reporter.

From Ithaca, he moved to New York City, where he opened a daguerreotype photography gallery in 1848, just eight years after the invention of the camera. He worked in the composing room of the New York Sun and in the late 1850s opened a securities and brokerage firm on Wall St.

In the midst of the Civil War, Holden was given the task of finding a coal supply for steam ships on the Great Lakes. That took him to Mineral City, then known as Mineral Point, in 1864.

He liked what he saw. He purchased 300 acres of coal land, secured a right-of-way for a railroad from Mineral Point to the Ohio and Erie Canal at Zoar and began mining coal. Work at the mines was suspended at the end of the war.

For a few years, Holden lived the life of a gentleman farmer outside of Mineral City with his wife, Sara. He always lovingly referred to Sara as his "girl wife," because they were married when she was just 16. The couple never had any children.

In 1872, Holden opened a clay plant at Mineral City that manufactured sewer pipe, fire brick and ornamental face building brick. The plant soon commanded a national market for its products. By 1908, it was producing 5 million pieces of its product line.

In 1884, he started Mineral City's first newspaper, the Mineral Point Express. When he had time, Holden would write and set type for the paper.

He served on Mineral City council in 1894 and as mayor in 1906 and 1907.

Holden exercised influence far beyond the city limits of Mineral City. "Holden was influential at cabinet tables and with presidents, because he knew whereof he spoke," the New Philadelphia Times said of him in 1923. "His range of knowledge covered so many points that he could advise this or that policy and it was done or undone as he suggested."

Holden counseled Abraham Lincoln when one of Holden's business partners attempted to swindle the government by selling it defective Austrian guns during the Civil War. Holden suggested to Lincoln that the guns be tested. After 40 out of the 200 guns tested exploded, Lincoln canceled the contract.

Holden advised President Warren G. Harding to name Will H. Hays as postmaster general after Harding was elected president in 1920. Holden had had dealings with Hays when Holden was a bidder on an incineration plant at Indianapolis in 1910. He had been impressed by Hays' talent.

Holden took credit for launching the political career of New Philadelphia's Vic Donahey by advising the future Ohio governor during the 1913 state constitutional convention. "Donahey was the only member of that convention in whom I could place any dependence," Holden later told the New Philadelphia Times.

In 1911, Holden sold his property at Mineral City, consisting of 500 acres of coal and clay land and factories, to George Markley for \$150,000. He and Sara retired to Canton, where they lived the rest of their lives.

Age didn't slow Holden down. When he was 94, he claimed that the vigor of his mind was greater than it was 50 years before. "He can penetrate a problem to its marrow easier now than when in the harness during General Grant's administration as president," the Times reported.

Just months before his death, Holden went to Washington to present President Calvin Coolidge with a plan for making aluminum money.

Sara Holden died June 3, 1925, and Charles died six months later on Dec. 27 at age 95.

Jon Baker is editorial

page editor of The

Times-Reporter. He can be reached via e-mail at

opinions@timesreporter.com.

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