

PENNSYLVANIA

A HISTORY

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ing law, and during the same time took charge of the Ludwick schools. Two years later he drifted into the real estate and insurance business. He had, in the meantime, passed the preliminary law examination, and was registered as a law student with a prominent firm of attorneys, but owing to the rapid growth of office business he abandoned further law studies, and up until his death was largely interested in Greensburg real estate and in insurance.

For thirty-five years, Mr. Bair had been identified with many enterprises in and about Greensburg, being one of the organizers of the Westmoreland Electric Company, the Westmoreland Light, Heat and Power Company, the Westmoreland Realty Company, the Greensburg and Southern Street Railway Company, the Merchants Trust Company, the Greensburg Finance Company, the Clare Coke Company and the Commonwealth Coal Company. Until his death he was the senior member of the firm of Bair & Lane, widely known among real estate and insurance men throughout Pennsylvania, with offices in Greensburg and Pittsburgh. In religion, Mr. Bair was a member of the Second Reformed Church of Greensburg, and had been a trustee of that church for many years. In politics he had kept the traditions of his father and was a Democrat. He was a life-member of the Masonic bodies in Greensburg, and had for thirty years been secretary of the Greensburg Masonic Fund, the financial head of the Masonic bodies of Greensburg.

He had always taken great interest in the public schools, but he was at war with the present high school system as carried on in Greensburg and most towns of Pennsylvania. He believed that it was the bounden duty of the commonwealth to give to each boy and girl a sufficient preliminary education to fit them to become good and useful citizens, and to give them the rudiments of an education in the vocations which they select for their life-work. His theory was that the great mass of boys and girls in our public schools must and do earn a future livelihood for themselves and their families by manual labor, and that, therefore, after having acquired a practical rudimentary education, they should be trained along vocational lines. To be more explicit, he strongly advocated the introduction of vocational education into our schools, even though it should be at the expense of the few who wish to prepare themselves to enter college. He was not opposed to a high school system which had for its object the rounding out of a practical education, but was opposed to making its primary object a preparatory training school for entering college. In other words, he advocated a high school system which contemplated the completion of thorough rudimentary education.

In 1906, while serving as school director, he took a decided stand along these lines and advocated the building of a large senior grammar and junior high school on a tract of land two hundred and forty feet square, commonly known as the Woods property and the Covenanter Church property, located on South Main and Fourth streets, but the issue was defeated, as was also his reelection. The "Daily Tribune," of December 20, 1906, said, among other things: "If E. H. Bair lives another decade, the fruits of his planting will have revealed the integrity of his purpose and the wisdom of his planning." In the fall

Edward Henry Bair was educated in the public schools of Salem Township and at the New Salem Academy. He related that perhaps through sympathy rather than educational qualifications he was made a teacher at the age of sixteen years in Salem Township. After teaching during three years he was elected principal of the New Salem schools, and during three summers, in partnership with the late I. E. Laufer, afterwards a member of the Westmoreland bar, had charge of the New Salem Academy. Mr. Bair was elected principal of the Scottdale schools in 1881, and after two years of work there, resigned and located in Greensburg for the purpose of study-

of 1917, and without solicitation on his part, he was placed in nomination by both political parties, and by a flattering majority was elected to the board from which he was ousted eleven years previous, thus vindicating the "Tribune's" prophecy as above quoted.

Two other propositions championed by Mr. Bair deserve special mention by the future historian of the city of Greensburg: First—He was uncompromising in his opposition to the building of the new court house on its present site. At the instance of the president judge and by request of the board of county commissioners, the firm of Bair & Lane secured options on almost the entire square between Second and Third streets and Main Street and Maple Avenue for approximately \$125,000, an amount not in excess of what could have been realized for the present site. A number of the business men owning property on Main Street between Otterman and Pittsburgh streets feared that the removal of the court house from the square would depreciate the value of their property. By use of the public prints they were able to defeat the enterprise, and today the present beautiful court house, crowded on land much too small for the structure, stands as a monument to the folly of those who defeated the project. Second—The building of a four-track system through the city by the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. After months of negotiation without reaching any agreement, the City Council asked the assistance of six of its citizens to act as an advisory committee in reaching an agreement with the railroad company, as shown by the following communication:

The Borough of Greensburg,
March 22, 1909.

Mr. E. H. Bair, Greensburg, Pa.

Dear Sir: The representatives of the Pennsylvania Railroad this evening met with Council and submitted a proposition looking to the making of four tracks through the Borough of Greensburg. This proposition was referred to the Finance and Street committees. At a meeting of the joint committee it was unanimously decided to ask yourself, Thomas Lynch, James S. Moorhead, Esq., John Barclay, W. W. Jamison and John S. Sell to be present with them and give them the benefit of your counsel and advice.

The joint committee will meet at City Hall on Friday evening, the 26th inst., at 7:30, at which time we hope to see you present.

Within ten days this committee presented to the Pennsylvania Railroad Company its views. Among other concessions, the committee asked of the railroad the following:

First. That the Arch street subway be widened to a full width street.

Second. That full width bridges be erected over the railroad at Maple Avenue, Main Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, that they be built of stone or concrete, and be maintained by the railroad company.

Third. That a full width subway be built under the railroad at Brushton Avenue.

Fourth. That a commodious foot-way be constructed north of the railroad between Harrison and Maples avenues.

Fifth. That all liabilities incurred by the borough of Greensburg in the contemplated improvements, be paid by the railroad company.

The actual work of the members of this committee was assigned by them to Mr. Bair, and they largely ascribe to his energy and to his knowledge of the existing conditions the benefits thus secured by our city. The finance and street committees officially thanked the Citizens' Committee as shown by the following letter:

The Borough of Greensburg,
April 2, 1909.

Mr. E. H. Bair, Greensburg, Pa.

Dear Sir: At a meeting of the Finance and Street committees held this evening, it was unanimously decided to extend to you as a member of the Citizens' Committee appointed to counsel and advise them in their negotiations with the Pennsylvania Railroad Company in regard to the proposed improvements by said company through the borough, their grateful thanks for the services you have thus far voluntarily rendered, and request that you do not consider yourself relieved from such further service as they may see fit to impose upon you.

Mr. Bair had not posed as a public speaker, but had frequently appeared on the platform, and his addresses were remarkable for their direct and concise style. When on the aggressive it seemed to be easy for him to completely puncture the object aimed at. His address before the annual convention of School Directors, delivered at Harrisburg, February 11, 1904, on "Rights and Duties of School Directors," and also his address before the annual convention of the Merchants' Association of Southwestern Pennsylvania, delivered at Greensburg, February 22, 1911, on "Co-insurance—Fire Waste—Legislation," have been published in pamphlet form and favorably discussed by educators and insurance men throughout the State. His address to the school directors of Westmoreland County at their third annual convention, held in Greensburg, in January, 1906, should be published and read by every school director taking the oath of office. It appeared in the daily papers at the time.

But though deeply engaged in many business enterprises of various kinds, Mr. Bair was, above all, an insurance man, and to that had given the best years of his life. He was an authority on that most important economic subject, not only in the courts of our county, but throughout the State as well. Aside from his business engagements, he had given much time and thought to the improvement and beautifying of the borough of Greensburg, his cherished desire being to make it an ideal community in which to live. "Kenneth Place" and "Underwood," developed by the firm of which he was a member, are lasting monuments of his ideals along this line.

An editorial appearing in the "Greensburg Press" of November 29, 1906, extending congratulations to Mr. Bair upon his recovery from a severe attack of typhoid fever, from which it was generally believed he could not recover, is worthy of reproduction here: WE'RE ALL GLAD YOU'RE GETTING BETTER, MR. BAIR

The "Morning Press" read with pleasure in the proof a little item in the news columns published today that should give great gratification to every Greensburger. It tells of the rapid recovery of Edward H. Bair, who has been seriously ill. It should be a genuine bit of Thanksgiving sentiment that this typical Greensburger should have passed the danger point and be now on the highway of recovery. There was a genuine regret voiced in Greensburg when the seriousness of Mr. Bair's condition was learned. It was evident that his loss would be keenly felt. Mr. Bair was never engaged in scotching the wheels of progress, and we really feel that every good Greensburger will join with the "Morning Press" in rejoicing over Mr. Bair's recovery. He has always been at the front in every forward movement. As a developer of Greater Greensburg he has been second to none. His departure would be missed, his recovery is a gain to Greensburg. He has an abiding faith in our future. He thinks Greensburg, he talks Greensburg. He does things and inspires others to do things. His pride in his home town is paramount. Greensburg could ill afford to lose him. His return to business life will be a distinct benefit to the community. The "Morning Press" felicitates Mr. Bair upon his recovery and sincerely hopes he will soon be in our busy midst.