

MORRIS HEAGY
April 20, 1838 – January 27, 1896

Overview

Samuel Heagy was one of the most influential business leaders and community figures in nineteenth-century Hampton, Illinois. Born on April 20, 1838, in Taneytown, Maryland, he overcame the hardship of losing both parents at a young age and ultimately built a successful career as a merchant, coal operator, civic leader, and investor. Through determination, business acumen, and community involvement, he became a central figure in Rock Island County's economic development during a period of rapid growth and industrial expansion.

After arriving in Illinois in the 1850s, Heagy first worked as a store clerk and later became a successful merchant. He subsequently became a pioneer in the local coal mining industry, helping open some of the earliest and most productive coal mines in northern Rock Island County. His business ventures contributed significantly to the growth of Hampton and neighboring communities. By the time of his death on January 28, 1896, he was widely recognized as a respected citizen whose integrity and enterprise had left a lasting impact on the region.

Family and Career

Samuel Heagy was born in Maryland to Samuel Heagy and Mary Smith Heagy. His father died before or shortly after his birth, and his mother died when he was six years old, leaving him effectively orphaned at an early age. Raised by others during his youth, he learned self-reliance and entered the workforce as a teenager. He worked in Baltimore as a clerk in a wholesale notion house before relocating to Hampton, Illinois, in 1857.

Upon arriving in Hampton, Heagy worked in the mercantile business and gained valuable commercial experience. In 1861 he purchased an existing store and began operating

independently. He later expanded his enterprise, and in 1868 formed a partnership with A. R. Stoddard under the firm name Heagy & Stoddard. The partnership became one of the area's most successful business ventures, combining retail trade with coal mining interests. Their store reportedly generated more than $75,000 in annual business, a substantial sum for the period.

He married Henrietta Birchard on April 20, 1863, after several years of acquaintance. Henrietta came from a prominent Scott County, Iowa, pioneer family. The couple had one son, Morris S. Heagy, who later became a leading banker in Rock Island and continued the family's tradition of public and business leadership.

Throughout his career, Heagy demonstrated a reputation for sound judgment, careful management, and ethical business practices. Contemporary accounts described him as systematic, methodical, and highly respected in business circles. His success was achieved through persistence and practical decision-making rather than inherited wealth or privilege.

Political Contributions

Although Samuel Heagy was primarily known as a businessman, he also played an active role in local government and civic affairs. Historical accounts state that he consistently supported the Democratic Party and was frequently selected as a delegate to party conventions. Although he did not seek higher office, he willingly participated in political activities he believed would benefit both his party and his community.

At the local level, Heagy served as a trustee for the Village of Hampton and as township school treasurer for more than twenty years. These roles placed him at the center of community administration and educational finance during a period when local government relied heavily on respected business leaders for guidance and oversight. His lengthy service suggests that residents trusted his judgment and financial stewardship.

Beyond politics, Heagy was active in civic and fraternal organizations. He was a member of the Masonic fraternity and a charter member of both the Ancient Order of United Workmen and the Modern Woodmen of America. These organizations were important social and charitable institutions within Midwestern communities during the late nineteenth century and reflected his commitment to civic engagement.

Local Economic Influence

Samuel Heagy's greatest legacy was his influence on the economic development of Hampton and Rock Island County. Alongside A. R. Stoddard, he helped establish the Hampton Coal Mining Company and opened the first major coal mine north of Rock Island in 1871. What began as a modest mining operation expanded into one of the area's most productive coal enterprises, eventually operating multiple shafts and producing dozens of railcars of coal each day. The company employed hundreds of workers and became one of the largest coal producers in the county.

The mines stimulated the growth of the community known as Happy Hollow, which developed into a thriving settlement with a post office, telegraph office, railroad facilities, and housing for miners and their families. By creating employment opportunities and

attracting supporting businesses, Heagy's mining operations directly contributed to regional population growth and commercial activity.

He also invested in transportation infrastructure, including railroad connections that improved coal distribution throughout the region. Although some ventures, including later mining projects and investments near East Moline and Mattoon, proved financially challenging, Heagy remained committed to expanding industrial opportunities in western Illinois. Even when faced with strikes, exhausted coal deposits, and substantial financial losses, he continued working to solve the economic problems confronting his companies.

Through his leadership in commerce, mining, local government, and community institutions, Samuel Heagy helped shape the economic foundation of Hampton and surrounding communities. His efforts left a lasting mark on Rock Island County's history and development.