

Biography of Francis O'Connor

Who's Who in Pennsylvania, A biographical Dictionary of Contemporaries
Edited by John W. Leonard; Second Edition, 1908
Page 502

O'CONNOR, Francis J.: Jurist: born in Somerset County, Pa., Aug. 11, 1860. He passed his boyhood on a farm, obtaining an education in common and private schools. He began teaching while quite young, filling seven terms in the public and five in the normal school of his county; after which he entered the Law Department of Michigan University. He graduated in 1884 and was admitted to the Circuit and Supreme Courts of Michigan. On his return to Somerset County, he spent one more year teaching, and was there admitted to the bar, and soon after to that of Cambria County. He removed to Johnstown in 1886, where he practised for several years in association with his brother, J. D. O'Connor. In 1889 he was elected district attorney for Cambria County, and in 1894 became city solicitor for Johnstown for a two years' term. In 1901 he was elected president judge of his district for the term of ten years expiring in January, 1912. Address: Johnstown, Pa.

History of Cambria County, Pennsylvania
By Henry Wilson Storey with Genealogical Memoirs
The Lewis Publishing Company, New York and Chicago, 1907
Volume III, Pages 80-81

Hon. Francis Joseph O'Connor, third son and fourth child of James and Elizabeth (Croyle) O'Connor, was born at what was then called Forwardstown, Somerset county, Pennsylvania, August 11, 1860. His preliminary education was acquired at the public schools of Somerset county, and at the special schools known as "normal schools," these being subscription schools for the preparation of teachers, and usually the instructors were those whose education and experience had fitted them for a professorship in the state normal schools. He was still a mere boy in years when he commenced teaching, and he taught several terms in the common schools and five terms in the normal school of his native county. In this field of labor he was very successful, but this was not the end and aim of his ambition. He sought a wider scope for the excellent talents he possessed, and accordingly entered the law department, of the University of Michigan and made such good use of his time in that institution that he was graduated in the spring of 1884 with the degree of Bachelor of Laws, and was admitted to practice before the supreme and circuit courts of the state of Michigan. He then returned to Somerset county, Pennsylvania, taught school for another year, and having passed the examination for admission to the bar of his native county on May 8, 1884, he commenced the practice of law at Somerset on May 4, 1885. He was admitted to practice at the bar of Cambria county, Pennsylvania, November 9, 1886, came to Johnstown, and opened a law office in Franklin street, opposite the old post office building. Later he formed a partnership with his brother, James B. O'Connor, and the firm of O'Connor Brothers had more than a merely local reputation and enjoyed a most lucrative practice This continued until 1889, when Hon. Francis Joseph was elected to the office of district attorney of the county. He was elected in 1894 to the office of city solicitor by the councils of the city of Johnstown, and faithfully and efficiently performed the duties of that office for the term of two years. In politics Judge O'Connor is a stanch Democrat, and is one of the acknowledged leaders of the party in that section of the country. During the campaign of 1894 he became involved in a controversy with General Hastings, then a candidate for the office of governor of the state. This grew out of the administration of affairs of General Hastings after the great flood in Johnstown, May 31, 1889, and was commented upon by the press throughout the United States. It finally resulted in a suit at law, which was settled by an agreement in the court of common pleas at Ebensburg, June 20, 1895, which in a way was eminently satisfactory to Judge O'Connor and his friends. Subsequently Judge O'Connor received the unanimous endorsement of the Democratic county convention for member of congress, but when he was tendered the office by the district Congressional conference, he declined in favor of R. C. McNamara of Bedford county. He was elected president judge of the several courts of Cambria county, November 3, 1901, to hold office for a term of ten years, taking his seat the first Monday of January, 1902. In this election he defeated Judge A. V. Barker, of Ebensburg, the Republican nominee, in a county which is strongly Republican, by overcoming three thousand votes, having received a majority of seventy-four votes. This testifies eloquently both as to his popularity and the respect and esteem in which he is held by the community. The manner in which he is executing the duties which this high office entails reflects the greatest credit upon the holder. He is deeply interested in everything tending to the development and welfare of Johnstown and Cambria county, and notwithstanding the demands upon his time

caused by his official position he visits his early home in Somerset county, where his aged mother still resides and with whom he spends much of his spare time. He is a great believer in the benefits of an outdoor life, and every fall spends a few weeks in the wilds of Maine or Canada, hunting deer. The religious affiliations of Judge O'Connor are with St. John's Catholic church, and he is a member of the Knights of Columbus. He has the happy faculty of being able to adapt himself to his surroundings, and wins the friendship and respect of those with whom he associates. He is a genial, kind-hearted man, and his friends are to be found in all classes of society. He is a fluent, eloquent speaker, presenting his arguments in a clear, convincing manner, and his earnest words and fine presence always make a strong impression. His personality is pleasing, and he has a strong, robust physique.

He married, October 28, 1891, Margaret Bailey, daughter of S. C. and Annie (Gleason) Bailey, of Johnstown.

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