

MAHANOY CITY CHRONICLES/Researched by Lorraine Stanton

It was a melting pot

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Herald writer

THE NAME HONECKER is missing from the scene today as Mahanoy City observes its 125th anniversary year, but scattered across this land is a legion of Honecker descendents whose family tree took roots in the town during its pioneer days.

Mr. and Mrs. Wilhelm Honecker, who started the family tree, were immigrants from Germany, where he was born in 1832 and she in 1835.

They came to Mahanoy City in the early 1860s and spent most of their life in the eastern end of town which was then referred to as "Hesse Stadt" because so many Germans from Hesse Cassel populated the neighborhood. This is the reason the Good American Hose Company, located at Eighth and Mahanoy streets, is referred to as "The Dutchies."

For more than 50 years, the Honeckers made their home at 1135 E. Pine St., where Mrs. Honecker was residing in 1925 when she celebrated her 90th birthday. She was then a widow and had 17 grandchildren, 23 great-grandchildren, and three great-great-grandchildren. Most of these descendents were already scattered far and wide, which provides some idea of the vast Honecker progeny existing out there today, four score and three years later.

For the occasion of her 90th birthday, Mrs. Honecker posed for the five-generations family portrait which accompanies this chronicle. Her oldest daughter, Mrs. Magdalene Dresch, who is pictured on the photo, was then 70 years old and living in town, at 1402 E. Pine St., but the others were residing in Wilkes-Barre. They included the granddaughter, Mrs. Frank Schilier; great-granddaughter, Mrs. Norman Tennis; and great-great-grandson Frank Tennis.

The Dresch family members, who will be featured in a future chronicle, were well-known on the local scene during the 1920s to 1940s for their involvement in the coal industry and public educational circles.

ELISHA FILER was a Mahanoy City boy born here during the town's first decade. He grew up with the new borough and became well-known in county governmental circles through his employment at the courthouse.

He was born here on July 13, 1870, son of Welsh immigrants. His father, Elisha, spent his early years working in the area mines and later became an engineer for the Lehigh Valley Railroad.

Young Elisha left school at the age of nine years and went to work at the collieries. He began picking slate at Tunnel Ridge Breaker in 1879 and for the next 25 years filled various positions at various collieries. He was serving as a coal inspector for the Lehigh Valley Coal Company when he decided to change occupations and turned to clerking.

In 1905 he took his first clerical job with the Harrison Ball Lumber and Hardware Company, remaining until 1908. During this period he also established an insurance/real estate business at his residence, 334 E. Centre St., where he continued to operate for many years.

In 1909 he became a clerk for the Lehigh Valley Coal Company at Centralia, but his tenure there was brief. Later the same year he accepted a position at the Schuylkill County courthouse as a law librarian and court crier for Judge Charles Brumm.

Locally he became active in politics and served a term on the borough school board. He also played a role in preserving history by his active membership in the Schuylkill County Historical Society.

The Filer family consisted of four children. Earle, Myrtle and Wilbur were born of his first wife, Eliza Jenkins. After her death, he married Lottie Webb with whom he had a son, Paul W.

One of the four children, Myrtle Filer, is still around, living in the Mahanoy High Rise. The others are deceased, Wilbur and Paul having died only last year.

VALENTINE MEDLAR represented the French connection in the melting pot that made up the population of Mahanoy City during its booming era. He also had the distinction of being a borough postmaster.

Valentine's grandfather, Daniel Medlar, was an immigrant from France who settled in Berks County and began farming in the latter 1700s. It was there that Valentine's father, George, was born in 1819. After George's marriage he situated in McKeansburg, Schuylkill County, where he became prominent as a justice of the peace, serving 40 years in that office. George's family during two marriages eventually grew to 23 children, one of whom was Valentine, born at McKeansburg on Aug. 7, 1851.

Valentine took up the trade of harnessmaking, for which found a ready clientele when he came to Mahanoy City in the mid-1860s. He plied that trade for nine years and then turned to clerical work for another nine years. During this time he also became active in politics, serving a term on the school board, and enlisted in the local military company, known as the Silliman Guards, which he served 10 years as a sergeant.

As a result of the prominence gained through these activities, he was appointed to a four-year term as postmaster beginning in April 1890.

Mr. Medlar was married on May 5, 1872, to a Mahanoy City girl, Mary Lawton. Their home was at 207 E. Pine St. and they had two children, William and Mary.

If the members of the Washington Hook and Ladder Company search their old membership rolls, they'll find the name of Valentine Medlar among them.



AN OLD FAMILY — The year was 1925 when this five-generation photo was taken of Mrs. Wilhelmina Honecker (seated left) and descendents. The baby, Frank Tennis, is held by his mother, Mrs. Norman Tennis, who is the daughter of Mrs. Frank Schilier (standing right) and granddaughter of Mrs. Magdalene Dresch (standing left). The photo is from the family album of Mrs. Dorothy (Dresch) Hines of Saint Clair.