

MAHANOY CITY CHRONICLES/Researched by Lorraine Stanton

'Where's the beef?' They had it!

By **BILL O'BRIEN**
Herald writer

WHO WAS the first butcher to supply meat to pioneer settlers in the newly developing town of Mahanoy City?

According to the borough's 1963 centennial history booklet, the butcher trade was practiced by three of the men who signed the petition for incorporation of the borough in 1863: William Krause, Frank Wenrich and Joel Miller.

Krause was listed as having his own local slaughterhouse, but he didn't stay long in town before moving to Locust Valley in 1863.

Wenrich came here from Tuscarora in 1862 and opened a butcher shop with Jonas Hines as a partner.

Miller was a butcher working for John Knapp at his shop at the northeast corner of Main and Market streets.

John Quinn was another of the early butchers, having a shop in the Cooperative Building at the northwest corner of Main and Centre.

These were all early butchers who received mention in the historic booklet, but lost somewhere in the early historic gleanings was the man who may have been the very first butcher on the scene: Lewis Wissman (Wiseman).

MR. WISSMAN apparently was a quiet and unassuming pioneer who went about his daily duties in quiet fashion, blending into the local scene without attracting attention.

The following information about him is contained in the obituary of his widow which was published in the Record-American on July 21, 1922:

"One of the first residents of Mahanoy City passed away yesterday afternoon when Mrs. Christina Wissman, wife of the late Lewis Wissman, died at the home of her nephew, Lewis Bachman, Tamaqua.

"Born in Germany on Jan. 25, 1831, she came to Mahanoy City when it was but a wilderness and her husband was probably the first butcher here. He conducted the business in partnership with William Krause." (Krause is the one mentioned above as a signer of the borough petition.)

THE OBITUARY stated that Mrs. Wissman left Mahanoy City in 1905 and her last residence here was with her daughter, Mrs. George (Amelia) Wertz, 325 E. Pine St.

Some years earlier, before the turn of the century, Mrs. Wissman and the Wertz resided at 402 E. Railroad St., which is the address listed for them in the 1890-1900 census directory for Mahanoy City. Mrs. Wissman then a widow and the Wertz had a son, Roy, five.

According to the 1922 obituary, Mrs. Wissman claimed an historic distinction of her own in the annals of Mahanoy City — she was the first member of the Evangelical faith to arrive here.

Her only surviving child was Mrs. Wertz. She also left a sister, Mrs. Catherine Bontz, who shared the Tamaqua residence with her nephew.

The death of Mrs. Wissman marked the end of the family name in Mahanoy City, but the Wertz name is still with us to provide a reminder of the pioneer ancestors who added their own special flavor to the Mahanoy melting pot.

SLAUGHTERHOUSE operators had the dubious distinction of being the first businesses fined for borough health violations. A notation in the minutes of the borough council meeting on June 28, 1866, stated: "All slaughterhouse owners fined \$20 because of complaints."

Some other interesting firsts in the town's history:

The first white settlers were Mr. and Mrs. John Reich who arrived about 1791 and lived in a log cabin near the northeast corner of Main and Market streets. For some years this was the only house in this section of the valley and served as an inn for travelers on the lonely Catawissa Turnpike.

First settler to become a permanent resident was Emanuel Boyer, who came from Tamaqua in 1853 to serve as land agent for the Little Schuylkill Company. He operated the first hotel, the Mahanoy House, 10 E. Centre St., opened in 1855.

First child born here was Rebecca Faust, daughter of William and Rebecca (Lindenmuth) Faust. The date of the birth is not known but it is known



PARADE DRESS — Folks in the old days went all out to dress up the town for a big parade. This photo a 1913 booklet (year of the homecoming celebration for town's golden anniversary) presents a view of the Main and Centre streets intersection "as it appears on state occasions." Among the oldtime celebrations fitting that category were the Grand Army Day on Sept. 5, 1892; Six County firemen's convention in 1907; State Elks Convention in 1912; Old Home Week in 1913; Red Men's Convention in 1916. This view also shows the original buildings that stood at the corners of the

to have taken place in the log house formerly occupied by the Reich family, and it occurred some time before March 1856 which is the recorded date of the second birth, a daughter to Mr. and Mrs. Emanuel Boyer.

Mahanoy City Post Office was established in 1859 (four years before the community became a borough), with John Lindenmuth as the first postmaster.

The first cemetery was located on the hillside just north of where the Reading Railroad depot stood. The site is long since lost in the overgrowth of brush, and there were no grave markers or records to indicate who was buried there. One historian conjectured the graves may have

been those of the first settlers, John Reich, his wife and son.

First map of the borough was drawn in 1856 by Frank Carter, a civil engineer for the Philadelphia and Mahanoy Coal Company.

First store, owned by the Thompson Brothers of Pottsville, opened in 1854 at the northeast corner of Main and Centre Streets.

THE FIRST school board convened in 1862. Technically, it was a Mahanoy Township school board since the borough was not incorporated until the following year. Members of the board were Dr. Lord Thompson; Frank

intersection. At left are the old Cooperative Building (northwest corner) and Thompson Brothers Store building (northeast corner); at right were the Mansion House Hotel (southwest corner, not pictured) and the John C. Knapp building (southeast corner) which is the only of the four structures still standing. The tall building up the street at left was the Hersker Theater which was later operated under the names of Family and State theaters, and last occupied by Morton Furniture Company before fire leveled the structure.

Carter, civil engineer who drew the first map of the town six years earlier; Benjamin Walburn, a tavern owner, and David Klingerman, occupation not known.

First school was the Spruce Street building, opened in 1862 with Oliver P. Bechtel as teacher (he later became a county judge).

First borough election was held Tuesday, Feb. 23, 1864, at the tavern of "Blin" Ryan, 16 E. Centre St. (Ryan's name was Philip and he lost his sight in a premature mine explosion. His building also was the site of the first Catholic Mass in town before

Saint Canicus Church was opened in July 1866.

Michael Barry and Edward Silliman were inspectors and Edward Boyer judge for that first election.

John Eichman elected the first chief Burgess. Term one year; salary \$75.

H. H. Stauffer was the first justice of the peace.

Elected to the first borough council were Patrick J. Barry, Mahanoy Tunnel contractor and coal operator (he served as the first council president); George Wiggan, coal operator; Frank Roth, carpenter; Thomas Fitzgerald, railroad contractor; William Schweitzer, blacksmith and tavern proprietor; Thomas Wescott, civil and mining engineer.

Jacob L. Bricker was first police chief, appointed Aug. 30, 1864. His non-paid force consisted of 20 citizens appointed by the borough council.

First coal operation was the Edward Silliman (North Mahanoy) Colliery. First coal was shipped in 1854. The first coal shipped via the Mahanoy Tunnel was in January 1863.

First small pox epidemic was reported in 1872.

First newspaper, Mahanoy City Gazette, published its first edition Nov. 11, 1865. First foreign language newspaper, Saule (Lithuanian), was founded 1888.

First church was the First Presbyterian, founded 1861.

First bank was the First National, founded Sept. 26, 1864. First fire company was the Hannane, founded June 18, 1868.

Mahanoy City Water Company was incorporated February 1886.

Mahanoy City Gas Company was incorporated Feb. 21, 1874.

Mahanoy City Light, Heat and Power Company was incorporated 1887, and the first electric street lighting was introduced on Jan. 16, 1888.

First swimming pool opened at the East End Park on July 4, 1915.

First trolley service was initiated in August 1892 (to Mahanoy Plane). Bowmans-Jacksons-Shenandoah branch opened in 1893. Trolleys were abandoned Sept. 30, 1927.

First scheduled bus service ran between Mahanoy City and Tamaqua by Schuylkill Transit Company beginning July 1922.