

## MAHANOY CITY CHRONICLES/Researched by Lorraine Stanton

# Early doctors were 'heroic' men

By BILL O'BRIEN  
Herald writer

**THE PHYSICIANS** who served the populace of Mahanoy City during the 19th century were men of heroic stature. Heroism is the most appropriate way to describe the work of these men who faced the daily task of ministering to a parade of bleeding and broken bodies brought from the mines and laid before them for healing.

Those old-time medical men of Mahanoy performed the most serious of operations, such as the amputation of shattered limbs, using primitive tools in primitive conditions, yet they saved an amazing numbers of lives.

The Samuel T. Wiley History of Schuylkill County (published 1893) identifies 29 doctors who practiced in Mahanoy City during the period 1881-93.

The list, taken from the county prothonotary's records, reports the following as having been members of the Schuylkill County Medical Society:

—1881: G. M. Miller, H. A. Klock, A. Phillip Bissell, L. M. Thompson, Thomas Lewis, Phaon Hermany, George F. Brendle, R. N. Ramsey, I. J. Bevan, Philip Weber, D. McDonald, J. Frick.

—1882: T. J. Ritter, B. H. Davis.

—1883: J. A. S. Moffet.

—1884: C. D. Miller.

—1886: Louis Weber.

—1887: H. R. Bricker, Jacob Roads.

—1888: C. C. Hagenbuch.

—1889: D. C. T. Watkins.

—1890: J. A. Jones, H. C. Fuller.

—1891: John Robertson

Bissell.

—1892: S. E. Wertman, H. N. Sherman, A. P. Seligman, J. A. Harrison.

—1893: W. J. Summowicz.

Four of these memorable medical men are featured in today's installment of Mahanoy City Chronicles:

**DR. HENRY A. KLOCK** was 30 years old when he arrived in Mahanoy late in 1878 and set up practice at 318 E. Centre St. His roots in Pennsylvania went back three decades before the Revolutionary War.

The first of the doctor's an-

cesters in was the greatgreatgrandfather who left Wurttemberg in 1743 and made his way to Berks County where he took up farming.

The doctor's greatgrandfather, John Peter Klock, was born on the Berks farm in 1771 and died there 79 years later (1850).

The doctor's grandfather, Peter R. Klock, also was born there in 1798 but eventually moved north to the newly created county of Schuylkill. He settled in the farming region of Eldred Township (Pitman Valley) where he married the former Elizabeth Zerfing and sired seven children. Peter was a founder of the Eldred union church and his tombstone in the cemetery there states that he died in 1869 at age 71.

The doctor's father, Joseph Klock, was born in the Eldred homestead on Nov. 29, 1824, and died there on May 26, 1865. A farmer, merchant, cattle and grain dealer, he married Magdalena Hepler whose grandfather was Casper Hepler, one of the first settlers in Eldred Township. Joseph and Magdalena had two children, Henry, who was to become the Mahanoy City doctor, and William, who remained at home to run the family farm.

Henry was born August 16, 1848, and received elementary schooling in Eldred Township. He went on to higher studies at Union Seminary (later Central College) in Union County and at the Quaker City Business School in Philadelphia.

Upon returning home, he accepted a position as clerk in the well-known Ashland store of Peter E. Buck. A short while later he opened a store of his own in Pitman which he operated until 1875.

His next venture took him to Philadelphia to study medicine at Hahnemann Medical College. After graduation on March 11, 1878, he entered a partnership with Dr. Benjamin Becker in Pottsville. Six months later he moved to Mahanoy City to open his own practice.

By his marriage to Elizabeth Seiler of Northumberland County he sired two sons, Joseph Victor, born March 19, 1873, and Egbert LeRoy, born Dec. 1, 1880. The oldest boy, Joseph, entered Hahneman



Dr. Henry Klock

Medical College in 1890.

The Klock family name is missing from Mahanoy City as the borough observes its 125th anniversary year, but there are some Klock descendents in the Eldred-Ashland area whence Mahanoy's newly arrived physician of 110 years ago had his beginnings.

**DR. LOUIS WEBER**, a pioneer local resident and the son of a doctor, grew up to become a physician and returned to practice locally. He was only three years old when his parents brought him here in 1862, a year before Mahanoy City became a borough.

The parents were natives of Prussia where his father, Philip Weber, was graduated from Heidelberg University Medical School in 1840. Two years later he married Amelia Frantz and in 1846 they came to the United States, settling in Tremont.

Shortly afterward they moved to Roaring Creek, Northumberland County, and finally came to Mahanoy City in 1862. The father died here on Jan. 11, 1889, at age 78, leaving his widow, Amelia, who was residing with two daughters, Hannah and Minnie, at 113 W. •



Dr. Louis Weber

Centre St.

Dr. Weber was born Christmas Day 1859 during the brief period that his parents lived in Roaring Creek. He attended grade school in Mahanoy City and studied at Swatara Institute at Jonestown, Lebanon County. His medical studies were taken at the Jefferson Medical College, the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy, and the New York University Medical School where he received his diploma in 1880.

He returned to Philadelphia to complete a year of clinical work, after which he conducted a practice for six years. During this time he also served as an assistant at Dr. Strawbridge's Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat Hospital, and visited Europe to study at medical institutions in Berlin, Heidelberg, London and Dublin.

In 1887 he closed his Philadelphia office and moved home to Mahanoy City, opening an office at 729 E. Centre St. He was married here on Saint Patrick's Day 1883 to Matilda Barlow, daughter of William and Salina (Kinselbach) Barlow. They had three children, William, Anna and Ida.

**DR. THOMAS LEWIS** was another local boy of pioneer parentage who grew up to become a physician and returned to minister to the people of his home town. He was four years old when he came here in 1864 from Tamaqua where he was born on April 30, 1860.

His parents, Thomas and Harriet (Reifschneider) Lewis, came from Wales to Tamaqua in 1844 and the father found employment in the mining industry, first as a laborer and later as a foreman. After settling in Mahanoy City, the father opened a drug store.

Young Thomas attended Mahanoy City grade schools and began to study medicine locally with Dr. P. A. Bissell, after which he went to Maryland for his formal education at the Baltimore College of Physicians and Surgeons. He received his medical diploma in 1881 and returned to Mahanoy City.

In addition to his local practice, Dr. Lewis assumed supervision of the family drug store at 33-35 E. Centre St., which had been run by his brother Charles until the latter

died in March 1883.

On Jan. 22, 1885, Dr. Lewis married Fanny Carter. They had three children, Charles, William and Robert.

**THE BISSELL FAMILY** produced two physicians in succeeding generations who came to serve the people of Mahanoy City.

No biography has been found for Dr. A. Phillip Bissell, but it is evident that he came to Mahanoy City prior to 1881, since that was the year he joined the county medical society. He is also listed in the Schuylkill County Census Directory of 1890, which showed his age then was 60. That places his birth in the year 1830. His address here was 300 S. Main St. and the census directory identifies other household residents as Susan, Sarah, John R. and Lillian, whose relationships were not indicated.

It is possible that the John R. listed in the household was the other Dr. Bissell, since his age was given as 23, the same as that given for Dr. John Robertson Bissell in Adolph Schlack's 1907 biographical publication of noted Schuylkill County residents.

According to the Schlack volume, Dr. John Robertson Bissell was born in Philadelphia in 1867, son of Augustus and Susan Bissell, and was graduated from Jefferson Medical School.

His father was a descendent of Zubulon Bissell, a colonial era settler at Litchfield, Connecticut, where he received a land grant from King George IV. Some of Zubulon's descendents served in General George Washington's Continental Army, which may explain how Augustus got to Philadelphia.

There are folks who lived in the area during the 1920s and 1930s recognize the name of Dr. Bissell, possibly even a few who were treated by him.

**WHAT MORE** fitting time than now, the quasiquintennial year, to pause for a while and reflect on the devotion to their calling practiced by these pioneer men of medicine as they healed the ills and injuries of generations who came and went in that long-ago era.