

MAHANOY CITY CHRONICLES/Researched by Lorraine Stanton

History of an 11-year-old town

THE EARLIEST known historical sketch of Mahanoy City was published in the Evening Herald in 1874, only 11 years after the borough was incorporated. It was written by Sara McCool, a Pottsville school teacher, who prepared it for the Herald as part of a series which appeared weekly under the title of "Schuylkill County Historic Gleanings."

The Mahanoy City portion was included in chapters 29 through 32 published on August 22 and 29, Sept. 5 and 12, 1874.

Miss McCool described her work as "A chronicle of the principal events in the history, and a record of the part taken by individuals and families in the settlement and development of the county from its first organization to the present time."

Excerpts from the series will be presented in the next two editions of Mahanoy City Chronicles.

THE UPPER portion of Mahanoy City was laid out in 1859 and 1860 by Messrs. Patterson and Kear, and the central and lower portions by Messrs. Dundas, Biddle, Troutman & Co. who were extensive land owners in this region.

Although thus divided in controlling interests, the town is regularly planned, having its streets lying at right angles nearly due east and west, presenting a parallelogram, with a small addition to the north in which are located the depot of Philadelphia and Reading railroad, which came to the town in January, 1863, and the Lehigh Valley Railroad, which arrived in the summer of

the same year.

The accommodations afforded by these roads bring Mahanoy City into immediate connection with New York and Philadelphia. Mail arriving every day from these busy marts is conducive to the prosperity and life of the entire valley.

THE SPEEDY GROWTH of the boroughs and villages in Mahanoy Valley rival the up-shooting of our western cities. Viewing Mahanoy City, but 11 years old, one cannot fail to regard it with astonishment. Centre Street extends nearly two miles and is neatly curbed and furnished with clean board walks.

The community has a hotel which for style and comfort cannot be excelled in the Schuylkill region. The Mansion House was erected in 1861 by the Mahanoy Coal Company, otherwise known as Dundas, Biddle, Troutman & Company.

The first landlord was Wilber B. Smith. He was succeeded by Samuel Munn and a Mr. Frost, during which time the ownership passed in the hands of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad. After an absence of three years Mr. Smith returned and is presently the proprietor. The Mansion House is lighted with gas manufactured on the premises.

Centre Street contains large and beautiful stores with show windows comparing favorably with those of larger places.

The First National Bank occupies the large building on the southwest corner of Centre and Main streets. It was organized on Sept. 20, 1864, at a meeting in the Mansion House. Abram



THIS A VIEW of Mahanoy Street looking west at the time the borough celebrated its 50th birthday in 1913.

Focht, Henry Meyer, Edward Sillyman (Silliman), William Reagan, Frank Carter, Edward Boyer and David Phillips were elected the directors. Mr. Focht was then elected the president and William L. Yoder was named cashier. The bank opened for business on Dec. 13, 1864, with a paid capital of \$50,000.

The Citizens Safe Deposit Bank is a new institution located in one of the store rooms connected with the wing of the Mansion House. It has not yet established itself fully in the business interests of the community.

THE COMMUNITY has two weekly newspapers which receive good support.

The Mahanoy City Gazette began publication on Nov. 11,

1865, with Dr. George Swayze as the editor. In 1866, the paper was purchased by William Ramsey and Charles Dunkleberger.

The Mahanoy Valley Record was established by Charles Spencer and printed its first issue on Nov. 2, 1871. The present editor and proprietor is John Parker, Esq., who purchased it in January, 1872.

Mahanoy City is supplied with superior spring water bought from Coal Run and Crooked Run, fresh mountain streams found in a red shale district outside of the coal measure at a distance of two and a half miles from the town. A small basin was made about 1863 but by 1867 the Mahanoy City Water Company, owing to the increase and growth of the town, found it

necessary to enlarge the works and construct a reservoir with a feeder. The work was commenced in 1873 and completed in a year, affording water privileges excelled by no other borough in the county. The force of the water is sufficient to throw it, simply by means of a hose connected to a street fire plug, from the opposite side of Centre Street, over the Mansion House, a building by no means of slight proportion.

The officers of the water company are E. S. Sillyman, Esq., president; George Wiggan, Frank Carter, B. T. Hughes and Peter F. Collins, directors. The last-named gentleman was the contractor who built the mountain road between Mahanoy City and Saint Clair.

The enterprising citizens also have formed a company for the manufacture of burning gas.

Wilber F. Smith, Esq., the proprietor of the Mansion House, is president; William B. Yoder, Esq., treasurer, and George M. Troutman, Esq., secretary. Other directors are John C. Knapp, E. S. Sillyman and Dr. Weaver. Ground was broken May 6, 1874, for the gas works, with the expectation of using gas by the middle of August so that before the first nippings of the autumn frosts shall rob the maple of its summer green or burst the prickly chestnut burr, Mahanoy City will be resplendent with that soft, penetrating light which scatters the gloomy shades of Erebus to the four corners of the earth.

CHURCHES IN Mahanoy City (as of 1874) are 13 in number, eleven of which are of the Protestant denominations and

two Catholic.

The religious needs of the Catholic residents before 1863 were attended to by priests from Pottsville and Tamaqua. In 1863, under Rev. Michael McEvoy, the construction of Saint Canicus Church began at Catawissa and Pine streets. Construction was set back considerably when a strong wind blew down the rear wall on Oct. 18, 1874. (Note: the same storm toppled the walls of the Methodist Episcopal Church then under construction on East Mahanoy street.) The church was dedicated in July 1866 by Bishop Wood, and the parish has been of rapid growth. Many of the men who labored in the building of the Mahanoy Tunnel (1859-62) were of this religious persuasion, as were others who flocked here to pursue the business of mining. The number of baptisms have been as high as 400 in one year. Rev. Charles F. McFadden, the current pastor, came here in 1871.

The Saint Fidelis Parish, serving the German Catholic populace, was formed at a meeting in 1863. Prior to that time, services were held in the Wallerius residence by Father Dittman of Saint Clair. Five lots were purchased on East Mahanoy street and construction of a church began in February 1866. The first mass in the new edifice was celebrated on Christmas day of that year. In November 1868, Father Beunig became the first pastor. He died in the smallpox epidemic in December 1872 and was succeeded by Rev. J. B. Maus, who came from Germany and is the current pastor.

(To be continued)