

MAHANOY CITY CHRONICLES/Researched by Lorraine Stanton

Adam and Bensinger: local business pioneers

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YOU WON'T find the names Adam or Bensinger in the current Mahanoy City telephone directory, but a century ago, when the town's population was 11,000 and growing, both names were prominent in local business and community life.

The following glimpses of these two family names are put together from various published sources in the town's booming years.

JOHN M. ADAM, a descendant of early settlers in Montgomery County, was 21 years old when he arrived in Mahanoy City in 1863, the year the town became a borough. He eventually became one of the community's leading business and a solid citizen. All of his nine children were born and raised here.

Adam began his business career as a clerk in a mercantile store at 49 W. Centre St., the same location where he eventually acquired the business and ran it on his own. In 1863 the store was owned by Kear & Rehr, but the latter died in June 1864, and Kear became the sole owner for the next five years.

In 1869, Mr. Adam was taken in as a partner and the firm became Kears & Adam. A year later, Kears sold his interest to a Mr. Brown and it became Brown & Adam. This association lasted until December 1892 when Brown sold out to Adam, who thereafter operated as the sole owner, selling general dry goods, groceries, flour and feed.

Adam's roots were strong in Montgomery County where his grandfather, John Adam, owned three large farms and a large timber tract. He died around 1855.

One of the grandfather's six children (three boys and three girls) was John H. Adam, who was born in 1824 and also grew up to be a farmer. He and his wife, Miss Mary Case, settled on a farm in nearby Hereford Township, Berks County, which the grandfather also formerly owned. John continued to cultivate the farm until his death on Feb. 10 1883.

John and Mary five children: Lizzie, John M. (the subject of this biography), Charles, Lucy and Edwin (Edwin eventually found his way to Mount Carmel and entered the mercantile business).

John M. was born on Aug. 15, 1842, and spent his youth learning the farming business alongside his father. However, after reaching his 21st birthday he decided farming was not for him, so he migrated north to the newly incorporated frontier of Mahanoy City. Once he became acquainted with the new borough, it became his home for the remainder of his life.

After acquiring a steady position in the mercantile business, he turned his attention to starting a family. He chose a Berks County girl, Kate Sanders, as his bride



Banks of yore These were the homes of Mahanoy City's two oldest banks which operated at opposite corners of Main and Centre streets during the early decades of the current century. At left is the Union National (founded Jan. 19, 1889) which built this structure at the northwest corner in



November 1922. Today, the structure is occupied by the Dollar General Stores. At right is the First National which did business at the northeast corner from the time it was founded on Sept. 26, 1864. This structure was used by the First National prior to 1930 when a new building was constructed

there. Due to the bank failures of the Great Depression, the First National was taken over by the Union National on June 7, 1937, after which the Union moved into the First National quarters. Today, the site is occupied by the Pennsylvania National Bank and Trust Company.

and they were married On July 4, 1870.

The couple's nine children, all born in Mahanoy City, were Charles L., April 13, 1871; Amos W., Dec. 9, 1873; Agnes, June 6, 1876; John, May 22, 1880; Annie, Oct. 17, 1885; Herman, June 11, 1886 (died Dec. 5, 1889); Joseph, Oct. 18, 1888; Anthony, Feb. 2, 1890; and Rose, Dec. 3, 1892.

CHARLES BENSINGER was an accomplished tailor and noted citizen of Schuylkill County long before he decided to make Mahanoy City his new home.

He came from one of the oldest Schuylkill County families, originating in "Bensinger's Valley," a 500-acre expanse of East Brunswick Township, Lewistown Valley (New Ringgold/McKeansburg area). This land was owned by his grandfather, Frederick Bensinger, who born in Montgomery County and migrated to the Lewistown Valley before the Revolutionary War, having received the land by Commonwealth patent years before Schuylkill County was on the map.

It was a tribute to Mahanoy City that a man of Charles Bensinger's

background should choose the newly founded community to spend the rest of his days.

When he arrived in town in 1868, Bensinger 46 years old and had 25 years of tailoring experience behind him. He opened a shop at 30 W. Centre St. and was still doing business there as the century neared its conclusion. An 1893 biography states that he was then one of the oldest tailors in the county, having been in the business more than 50 years.

The county was only eleven years old (founded in 1811) when Charles Bensinger was born in

Bensinger's Valley to on June 24, 1822, to Jacob and Hannah (Dreher) Bensinger. His father was a farmer and blacksmith who plied his trade in Middleport during the 1830s and 1840s, before returning to the Lewistown Valley where he died in 1847 at age 51.

When young Charles decided to leave the farm he went to Pottsville and became an apprentice in tailoring. In 1843 he went to Middleport, where his parents were living, and opened his own tailoring shop. He spent the next 25 years there. In addition to tailoring, he served eight years as

the Middleport postmaster, having been appointed by President Lincoln, and served on the borough school board. It was there that he married a Lewistown Valley girl, Christina Kleckner, who bore him eleven children.

Although he was well-established in Middleport and a noted citizen of the Schuylkill Valley, Mr. Bensinger was attracted to the opportunity awaiting in the newly developing coal fields of the Mahanoy Valley. It isn't known whether he went by horseback over the Catawissa Turnpike via Locust Valley, or by train

over Philadelphia and Reading line via Tamaqua and the Mahanoy Tunnel, but he packed up his belongings and went north to the Valley of Mahanoy.

The town's newest tailor wasted no time in becoming one of its active citizens. He was elected to serve on the Mahanoy City School Board, was a prominent member of Saint John's English Lutheran Church, and belonged to the Mahanoy City Free and Accepted Masons Lodge 357 and the International Order of Odd Fellows.

According to the 1893 biography, one of the Bensinger daughters, Emily, was married to the superintendent of the Jersey Central Railroad, residing in Elizabeth, N.J.

Other children listed at that time were: Mrs. Theodore (Sarah) Hammer, Philadelphia; Joseph, proprietor of the Commercial Hotel in Dubois, Clearfield County; John, Stroudsburg; Hannah, at home; Howard, associated with his brother Joseph in the Dubois hotel business; Hannah, at home; Mrs. E. Frederick (Ida) Vosburg whose husband had a drug store in Dubois. Four other children were deceased.

Quasqui: What does it mean?

MAHANOY CITY — The term "quasquicentennial" has local folks gentry scratching their heads since it was introduced a few weeks ago to describe the borough's 125th anniversary.

Where does the word come from and what does it mean, they'd like to know?

The word doesn't appear in the local dictionaries or in the Latin language book kept at the Mahanoy City Free Public Library.

It first appeared in the Mahanoy Valley back in 1982 when Ashland folks introduced it in conjunction with their borough's 125th anniversary.

Although "quasquicentennial" is not in the dictionary, the word "sesquicentennial" is, and just about

everybody knows that sesquicentennial pertains to 150th anniversary.

Webster's New Collegiate (1977 edition) explains the prefix sesqui thus: "Latin combined form meaning literally 'and a half.'" Thus, sesquicentennial is a centennial and a half.

By like reasoning, "quasqui" is the combined Latin form meaning "and a quarter." Thus, the term quasquicentennial means "a centennial and a quarter."

However, if you happen to be the type who shies from language that tends toward the high-falutin', just stick to 125th. General Chairman Danny Lewis says the town is going to have just as much fun this year no matter what name they hang on the celebration.