

MAHANOY CITY CHRONICLES/Researched by Lorraine Stanton

## Their roles were significant ...

### Rev. Bock, Charles Boner helped to shape the community 95 years ago

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Herald writer

(The following biographical sketches from 1893 trace the roots of people who played significant roles in the life of Mahanoy City 95 years ago, as the town was entering its third decade as a borough.)

**REV. GEORGE M. BOCK**, a brilliant young preacher from Rochester, N.Y., became pastor of Christ Lutheran Church in August, 1893.

Although only 23 years old at that time (he was born Jan. 25, 1870), he had already proved his ability during his first year in the ministry at Port Carbon.

It was evident from childhood that George Bock was possessed of special intellect. He made history at Wagner College in Rochester when he was admitted as a student at age 13 and was graduated in 1888 at the age of 18, becoming the first student in the school's history to complete a six-year course.

He immediately entered Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and was graduated in 1892, being ordained at Reading.

His first call was to Schuylkill County where he took charge of the churches in Port Carbon, Saint Clair and Middleport. The Port Carbon and Middleport congregations were disorganized, with members scattered among other churches, but within one year the young pastor he had both churches in excellent condition and was ready to move on to another challenge.

On August 1, 1893, he became pastor of Christ Lutheran Church in Mahanoy City which also was somewhat disorganized, having been some time without a resident pastor. With characteristic energy and en-

thusiasm, Pastor Bock set about the work of bringing together the disorganized elements and putting the church good order.

This work, although merely in its inception in 1893, was already bearing fruit as the numerically weak membership began to attract new members each week.

Rev. Bock was admired as a speaker in both English and German. He also possessed rare executive ability and an affable disposition that made it easy for people to like him and follow his lead.

The Bock family in the latter 1800s was prominent in Rochester. Rev. Bock's father, George, was born in Hesse, Germany, in 1838 and shortly after his 21st birthday he emigrated to the United States, locating in Rochester.

By industry, thrift and frugality, he accumulated considerable real estate and had it laid out for building lots, thus contributing to the growth and prosperity of the city. He was also proprietor and owner of the Half Way House there.

Twice married, his first wife was Elizabeth Shaft with whom he two children, Henry and Libbie. His second marriage was to Catherine Stunz, who was the mother of Rev. Bock.

**CHARLES BONER** was one of the early settlers who came to the valley with his family at a time when Mahanoy City was still a frontier town.

He represented the third generation of the Boner family in America, his grandfather having emigrated from Ireland and settled in Pennsylvania in the early 1800s.

Charles spent his early years in Berks County where he married Miss Priscilla Smith. In the 1840s, the couple moved north to Schuylkill County and operated a small farm in the Lewistown Valley.

In 1861, Charles was attracted to the newly

developing town of Mahanoy, and moved there with his family, two years before Mahanoy City became a borough. The Mahanoy Tunnel was still under construction, providing work for blacksmiths, as did the collieries springing up all around the town.

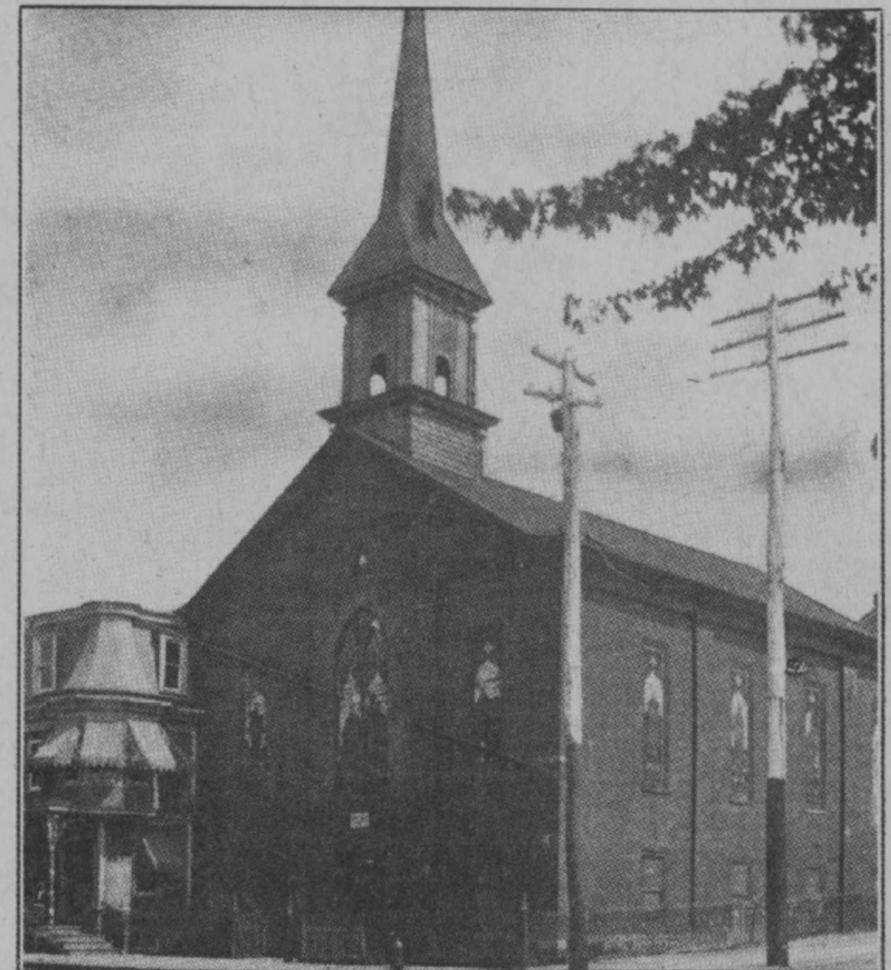
The Boners lived at 403 E. Mahanoy St. where Charles died in 1891 at age 75. They had six children, only three of whom were living at the time of the father's death.

One of the sons, Henry S., was superintendent of the Lutheran Publishing Company in Philadelphia. Another, Nathan S., was manager of the Alexander Scott store on Lehigh Avenue in Frackville. A daughter, Sarah (widow of Oliver Peters of Lehigh County) was living at home and taking care of the aged parents.

The deceased children were Lewis, who was a bookkeeper in Pottsville when he died in 1891; Charles, also a bookkeeper, who died in 1890; and Albert, who died in infancy.

Nathan, the son in Frackville, learned the store business by serving as a clerk during his latter teenage years in Mahanoy City. However, in 1866, at the age of 20, he succumbed to the lure of adventure and enlisted in the U.S. Army. He spent most of the next three years stationed in Nevada, after which he returned to Mahanoy City to settle down. He accepted the position in Frackville and married Miss Margaret Bone, who came from a Scotch family in Canada. They had seven children: Priscilla, Minnie, Ambrose, Daisy, Earl, Harry and George.

Today, as Mahanoy City observes its 125th year as a borough, that name Boner is still very much in evidence locally, with five families by that name listed in the 1987 telephone directory. Perhaps some of them are descendants of that pioneer family who planted their roots here in 1861.



**OLD CHRIST CHURCH** — You'd have to be pushing three score years to remember the original Christ Lutheran Church in Mahanoy City, pictured here in 1913 when the town was celebrating its 50th birthday. The old edifice was razed in 1937 to make room for construction of the present church. Differences in language and traditions between German and English members bred difficulties for the church in its first few years, resulting in a split that led to the creation of Saint John's English Lutheran as a separate church. But thanks to some dedicated leadership by some of the early pastors (such as the one whose biography appears below), the German congregation grew steadily and today, like the borough of Mahanoy City, Christ Lutheran Church is alive and well in this, its 125th anniversary year.