

MAHANAY CITY CHRONICLES
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PHYSICIANS HELPED MOLD BOROUGH

Today's Chronicles tell the story of two physicians who played important roles in the early history of Mahanoy City.

SWAYZE is a name long gone from the directories of Mahanoy City, but it's a name that made medical history in the borough as well as the county.

Dr. Robert Beaver Swayze, his daughter Dr. M. Alice Swayze, and his son, Dr. George B. H. Swayze were part of a father-son-daughter medical team which must have been one of the first (if not only one) one in Schuylkill County (perhaps even state) history.

Dr. Robert, born in 1809, at Hope, Warren County, N.J., was 51 years old when he decided to give up the security of a farming and lumbering business in Columbia County and start anew in the primitive town of Mahanoy City.

Arriving here in 1861, he set up a drug store and medical practice in the 200 block of West Centre Street. He found the new town to his liking and stayed until he was in his 80s.

An 1864 pictorial map of the town lists Dr. Robert Swayze as one of the four "touring physicians". The other doctors were (1) Dr. George F. Brendle, a signer of the charter petition and the first known physician to locate here, having arrived in the mid-1850s and died in 1907. His son, George, also became a doctor with an office at 36 S Main St.; (2) Dr. Phaon Hermany, whose biography is included below in this chronicle; (3) Dr. Louis M. Thompson, who came from Pottsville and entered the grocery-dry goods business with his brother, opening their store at the northeast corner of Main

and Centre streets, a building shared by the First National Bank upon its founding in September 1864 and later taken over by the bank.

Dr. Robert Swayze immediately took an active role in the new community. His name is found on the petition which local citizens filed for the creation of Mahanoy City Borough in 1863. He was also the prime mover in the organization of a Methodist Society in 1861, serving as leader of its first religion class and personally contacting ministers in other county towns to supply the congregation until it was large enough to build a church and attract its own pastor in March 1864.

Dr. Swayze's oldest son, George, studied medicine at Jefferson College, Philadelphia, where he was graduated in 1859. After serving as a surgeon in the Union Army during the Civil War, he came to Mahanoy City to join the family.

George not only practiced medicine in Mahanoy City, but also became a pioneer in local journalism. He served as the promoter and first editor-in-chief of the town's first newspaper, The Gazette, which began publication on Nov 11, 1865.

M. Alice Swayze was a real pioneer in her profession in Mahanoy City as well as Schuylkill County. Her breaking into a profession then dominated by males was noted in the Samuel T. Wiley history of Schuylkill County in 1893 which stated:

“The very kindly recognition of Dr. M. Alice Swayze by the generous-minded profession in Schuylkill County has done much to disperse the narrow prejudice which medical men formerly entertained toward women physicians. She was promptly elected to membership in the Schuylkill County Medical Society, appointed to prepare papers on professional topics, made delegate to and member of the State Medical Society of Pennsylvania, and elected vice president of the Schuylkill County Medical Society”.

M. Alice completed preliminary studies at Dickinson Seminary, Williamsport, before entering Women's Medical College, Philadelphia, where she received her medical degree with the class of 1873. After a year on the staff at Women's Medical, she came to Mahanoy City to join the family practice, specializing in gynecology and pediatrics.

Dr. M. Alice left Mahanoy City in 1875 and opened an office in Pottsville.

Her brother, Dr. George, also left town in the 1870s and located in Philadelphia where he combined the medicine-journalism professions he knew in Mahanoy City, becoming a practicing physician and medical writer.

Their father, Dr. George, was 82 when he left Mahanoy in 1891, 30 years after he had arrived here, and returned to the farm in Columbia County.

His second oldest son, Clark, spent a few more years in town, conducting a grocery business on South Main Street.

Another son, Theodore, was a fruit grower in the Berwick area, and a daughter, Lizzie, was married to Perry Black, a lumberman and builder at Rohrsburg, Columbia County.

DR. PHAON HERMANY is another name which has been lost in the generations since Mahanoy City's frontier days. But next time you see the local fire department in action protecting lives and property, remember the name Phaon Hermany as belonging to one of the pioneers who paved the way to make it possible.

Phaon was 23 years old and a brand new physician when he arrived in Mahanoy City in 1863. He was a descendent of the well-known Kistler clan (his mother was Salome Kistler) which produced several generations of physicians and a few clergymen in the Lehigh Valley and surrounding counties (Dr. J.S. Kistler was a noted physician in Shenandoah during the early decades of this century).

On the paternal side, Dr. Herman's grandfather, Philip, was born at sea 1754 while his parents were sailing from Germany to America. The family (then named Hermon) made its way to the farming region of the Lehigh Valley and settled permanently. It was there that grandfather Philip was raised, married and sired a family, one of whom was John (father of Phaon).

John was born in 1800 and died in 1863. He and his wife, Salome Kistler, had 10 children whom they raised on their farm. John also erected a store

and hotel which eventually attracted other settlers and became known as the village of Jacksonville. He was the village postmaster for 20 years.

It was at Jacksonville that Phaon was born on September 16, 1840. He was sent to neighboring Montgomery County to be educated, after which he spent two years teaching school. He then became interested in medicine and entered the University of New York Medical School. Shortly after his graduation on March 3, 1863, he came to Mahanoy City and settled at 66 S Main St., where he opened a pharmacy and hung out his M.D. shingle.

Dr. Hermany was one of the leading citizens who began the movement for creation of a local fire department. On June 18, 1868, when a group of 28 men established the Humane Fire Company No.1, Phaon Hermany was elected treasurer.

He was also a leader in local freemasonry, having served various offices in all the local organizations including Free and Accepted Masons Lodge 357, Mizpah Chapter 252 of Royal Arch Masons and Ivanhoe Commandery 31 of Knights Templar. In addition, he belonged to the Philadelphia Consistory; Ancient Arabic Order of Nobles of the Mystic Shrine of LuLu Temple, Philadelphia, County 162 of Royal Arcanum, Mahanoy City, and Northwestern Masonic Aid Association.

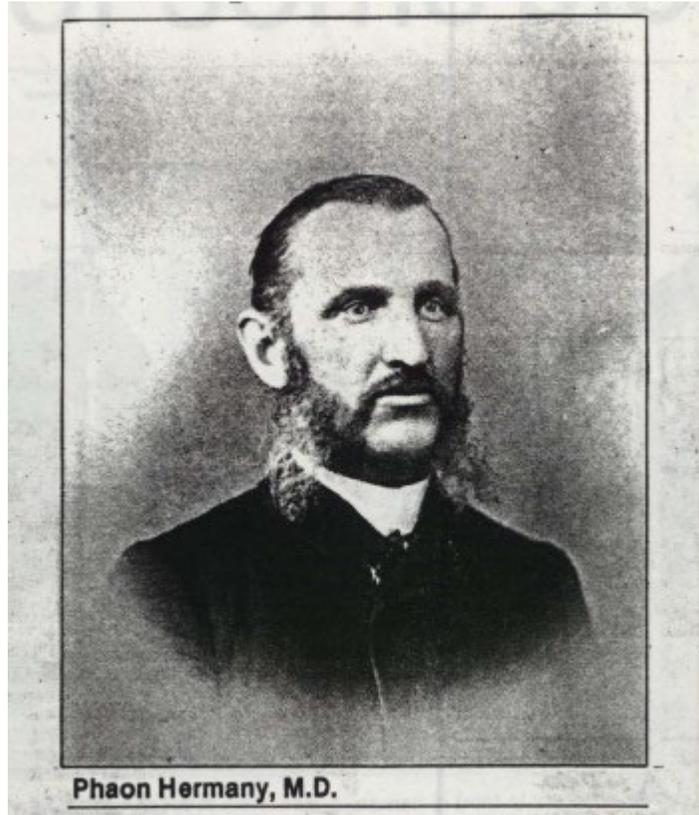
Washington Camp 124 Patriotic Sons of America and Asa Packer Lodge 328 International Order of Odd Fellows also listed him as a member.

On Dec 6, 1863, six months after his arrival in Mahanoy City, Dr. Hermany was married to Miss Mary J. Bowman. (The Bowmans were prominent early settlers in the town. The Mahanoy Township village of Bowmans is named after the brothers, David, Peter and Jonas who operated the colliery in that vicinity).

Dr. Hermany and his wife had three children. One of the boys, Horace, became a doctor in Philadelphia after graduation from Jefferson Medical College in 1892. The other two children were girls, Susan and Sally.

These were the professionals who dedicated their lives to treating the ills of a populace and mending the wounds of countless men and boys injured at the collieries in the long-ago era.

But not only did they attend to the medical needs of the community, they also found time to involve themselves in civic, religious and other important activities that helped salve the growing pains of a boom town groping its way to maturity.



Phaon Hermany, M.D.