

MAHANOY CITY CHRONICLES/Researched by Lorraine Stanton

The people of early Mahanoy...

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Herald writer

WILLIAM GEIGER'S contribution to Mahanoy City was flowers. He was the town's first florist.

Prior to his arrival here at the end of the borough's first decade, the local pioneers had little time to think about flowers, since their days were occupied by the building of a town and working the mines.

By 1870 the new borough was solidly situated and had a booming population of 5,500 citizens who were ready for the niceties of life which William Geiger brought to them.

A native of Germany, he was 17 years old when he migrated to Philadelphia. After a few months there he came north to Schuylkill Haven and developed a pottery business which prospered for several years.

Mahanoy City was in its seventh year as a borough when Mr. Geiger decided to settle here. He chose the town's German quarter on East Mahanoy street and initially began manufacturing pottery. Shortly afterward he established the flower business in addition to a nursery which the family operated for 44 years.

After his death in 1900 the business was run by his widow, the former Joanna Hammer, and when she died several years later it was taken over by their daughters, Augusta and Clara, until they retired in 1914.

There were two boys in the family but they left to seek their fortunes elsewhere. John went to Liverpool, Ohio, where he established his own pottery business, and William went to the northwest where he found success as a gold prospector.

So next time you see a bouquet fashioned by today's local florists, Brennan's on North Main street or Wendi's on West Centre street, remember William Geiger who paved the way for the flower business to take root and blossom in the metropolis of the Mahanoy Valley.

ISRAEL YOST never lived anywhere near Mahanoy City, but he played a significant role in the lives of the town's pioneers.

As a farmer in the Lewistown Valley back in the 1870s and thereafter, he drove his horse and wagon over primitive roads across three mountains to serve customers on his huckster route in Mahanoy City.

And while visiting the borough he did most of his banking business here, acquiring a considerable block of stock in the First National Bank.

Mr. Yost was a lifelong resident of East Brunswick Township, where he was born on Sept. 19, 1835, son of Johnathon and Mar (Kleckner) Yost.

For eight years he worked as a miller but gave it up at the age of 28 to buy a 100-acre farm. In addition to working the farm and huckstering in Mahanoy City, he found time to run a hotel business near New Ringgold. In 1891 he opened a creamery at Myerstown, Lebanon County, and placed it under the management of his son, Salem.

Mr. Yost died on his farm on May 27, 1905.

FREDERICK BENSINGER was another farmer from East Brunswick Township who made the long weekly haul to huckster in Mahanoy City. Eventually he decided to move here but his stay was cut short by misfortune.

Frederick was member of the noted Bensinger clan which pioneered the settlement of Bensinger Valley near McKeansburg. He was born there on July 15, 1835, and spent his early boyhood working on his father's farm. However, at the age of 15 he succumbed to the lure of adventure and went to New York to work on the Delaware and Hudson Canal boats running the North River between New York City and Rondout.

Subsequent ventures found him working as a brakeman on the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad between Philadelphia and Pottsville, as a cabinet maker in Port Carbon and a housing construction carpenter and painter in Mauch Chunk.

During the latter 1870s he returned to the haunts of his boyhood and took up farming in East Brunswick Township which including his huckstering trips to



BELLES OF MAHANOY — Did you know that Mahanoy City once had its own official preliminary to the Miss America Contest? Above on stage at Lakewood Ballroom on the evening of July 16, 1946, are finalists in the local competition: (from left) Kitty Markle, Millicent Tichonevich, Rose Durkin, Glenna Feller, all of Mahanoy City, and Rosemary Deffley of Jacksons. Ms. Durkin (now Mrs. John Fletcher) was named Miss Mahanoy City and went to the state finals at Wellsboro where she scored highest in the evening gown competition among the 24 contestants but the Miss Pennsylvania

Mahanoy City. Many a tedious hour was spent driving the team back and forth over miles of winding roads across Second, Sharp and Broad Mountains, and along the lonely passages through Devil's Hollow, Schuylkill and Locust valleys.

He came to like Mahanoy City and decided to make it his home.

Moving here in 1880, he found work as a huckster for Henry K. Smith who conducted a grocery business at 5-7 E. Centre St.

Mr. Bensinger then opened his own grocery store which he ran while his son, John, went out huckstering for him. However, fire struck and put him out of business. Apparently lacking the

title went to a girl from Lebanon County. The Mahanoy contest was sponsored by the Eagles Social Club of dear mency and was run by club member Tony Waak who was a real pro at producing such events (the oldtimer is still around and pleasant as ever). A crowd of 1,500 attended the Lakewood show, and Lee Vincent's Orchestra supplied music. Other contestants on stage that memorable evening were Margaret Techentine, Frances Putnik, Jeanne Pasieka, Claire Walsh and Catherine Davis. Bring back those good old days.

willand the wh'rewithal to start anew, he left Mahanoy City and returned to the McKeansburg area to spend the remainder of his life cultivating a small farm and working part time as a painter.

His son, John, also left Mahanoy and located in Schuylkill Haven where he

established a painting business.

JOHN J. FISHER was one of the first boys from Mahanoy City to enter the Protestant ministry.

Born in Pottsville in 1855, he was three years old when he arrived here with his parents, Daniel and Lydia (Spankuchen) Fisher.

Mahanoy City was then just a village consisting of a handful of wooden buildings, but during the next 10 years Daniel Fisher contributed to the construction of many more structures. His trade was brickmaking and he operated a kiln which produced many of the bricks that went into local projects. Some of those Fisher bricks probably are still to be found serving their purpose in the places they were laid more than a century ago.

In pursuing the ministry, young John Fisher took after his great-grandfather, Jacob, an immigrant from Wurtenburg, Germany, who was a Reformed preacher in the Friedensburg area during the early 1800s. All succeeding generations of the Fisher clan were staunch followers of the Reformed faith, including John's father, Daniel, who was one of the 13 men who established the Reformed church in Mahanoy City.

Young John, after graduation from Mahanoy City schools in 1873, enrolled in Ursinus College and was graduated second in his class in 1878. He remained on campus for another year to attend the Reformed seminary and finished the studies in June 1879. That same year he accepted his first call to Trinity Church, Tamaqua, a charge which included the congregations of Saint Peter in Locust Valley, Christ Church in Rush Township, and Union Church in Delano.

Pastor Fisher was married to the former Sarah Wagner of Mahanoy City and they had three children: Calvin, Gertrude and Mary.

The pastor's father, Daniel, discontinued his brick business in 1870 and became supervisor for the borough. He was a native of the Friedensburg area. His wife, Lydia Spankuchen, was a native of Pine Grove Township. Their home in Mahanoy City was at 317 E. Pine St.