

MAHANOY CITY CHRONICLES/Researched by Lorraine Stanton

Pioneers who grew with borough

By **BILL O'BRIEN**
Herald writer

JOHN FEITCHNER spent 73 of his 80 years in Mahanoy City and grew with the town from the day it was christened a borough.

All his working life was spent in the mining industry, and he had the tragic experience of working on the job with his father when the latter was killed in an accident at the Primrose Colliery in 1876.

John was only 20 years old at that time, but he already had 10 years of mineworking experience and the loss of his father didn't dissuade him from remaining on the job.

By World War I he had hung up his mining boots and retired, but when duty called him back to the colliery he was prompt to help the war effort, filling in for younger men taken away by military service. His expertise as a pumpsman, fireman and hoisting engineer made him a valuable asset to any colliery in need of manpower to perform such key functions.

He was born in Greenbury Valley, near Heckscherville, on Oct. 3, 1856, and was seven years old when his parents, Frank and Dorothy (Deach) Feichtner, trekked north to Mahanoy. It was 1863, the year of the borough's incorporation, and young John would watch the wilderness settlement grow from little more than a thousand residents to a peak of 15,936 in 1910, then slowly begin a downslide to about 14,000 at the time of his death on March 29, 1937.

The Feichtner family's first residence here was a two-room log cabin at 217 W. Spruce St. A lifelong bachelor, John lived there with his mother until her death in 1909, after which he boarded with a first cousin, Mrs. Jacob Stahler, and her family at 219 E. Pine St., the address at which he died.

One of the first German Catholic families to locate in Mahanoy City, the Feichtners were founding members of Saint Fidelis Church.

In his waning years, John had vivid memories the pioneer environment he knew in childhood. He described the town of few structures in a thickly wooded tract with creek zig-zagging north and south from the foot of one hill to the other on its westward course through the valley. He remembered the construction activity then underway, and told of spending hours of boyhood fascination on Catawissa street watching the masons build the old Saint Canicus edifice from hand-hewn mountain stone.

At the time of his death, he had two surviving brothers, both in town: William, who still resided in the West Spruce street homestead, and Francis.

HENRY ALBERT DIETER was another pioneer of German extraction whose lifetime spanned the growing years in Mahanoy City. He was born in Landingville on Sept. 15, 1859, and arrived here in 1865 with his parents, Christian and Mary (Reuter) Dieter.

After a brief residence on the south side of the 400 block of East Centre street, the family moved to 108-110 E. Centre St., now occupied by the Pennsylvania State Liquor Store, where the father established a bakery, confectionery and ice cream manufacturing trade, both wholesale and retail, which would become a landmark business at that address for 60 years.

The original bakery building, a small frame structure, was destroyed by fire in 1875. The elder Mr. Dieter built a new structure and resumed the business until Oct. 31, 1891, when he retired and turned the trade over to sons Henry (better known as "Allie") and Charles.

The sons continued the business until March 1, 1924, when they retired and moved to adjoining residences at 101-03 East Pine street, just in time to make their store building available to the town's newest veterans organization, the American Legion.

The legionnaires, a bustling group of ex-dougboys who had returned home just a few years

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A few years ago the sporting world was turned into a frenzy by tales of deeds of daring from a small college in the center of Kentucky. A heretofore unheard of gridiron eleven, spotting opponents in weight and size, smeared everything that came their way. Coached by Charley Moran, famous baseball umpire, the football aggregation of Center College, spearheaded by the peerless Red Roberts, left a trail of devastation and destruction in its wake.

It came out that before every contest, the Kentuckians knelt in prayer, and overnight they became known as "The Prayin' Colonels."

For exactly the same reason, the warriors of Mahanoy City High school are becoming known as "The Prayin' Coal Crackers." This writer, through close association with the lads who wear the Maroon and Black, has knowledge of what takes place before the athletes of Coaches Geopfert and Stine take their positions on field. The sight is picturesque in the stands, but to those knowing the inside story it is even more so.

It is not unusual for a team to gather in the center of the field just before the initial kickoff for final instructions. But the MCHS lads have their own special ceremony. The captain's hand goes down on the sod and on top of it go the hands of the other ten players. The famous motto of Bill Roper's Princeton eleven is recited: "The team that won't be beat, can't be beat." Then comes a moment of silent prayer and the boys are ready to go on with the game.

The ritual began with the state championship basketball team of 1922. In the final game, with the score tied at 17 and time running out, the team took a time out and the players dropped to their knees in prayer. The result was evident when the final whistle blew with the score 22-17 and MCHS in possession of the state title.

Since then, not an athletic team of Mahanoy City high enters a game without praying.

BUSINESS OF OLD — This page from a 1902 MCHS commencement program booklet provides a glimpse at some of the firms

doing business in town when the century was new. The booklet is from the George Barlow collection.

earlier after quashing The Kaiser's war machine, were looking for a home in which to share their comradery. The Dieter building was just the ticket, and the vets conducted a public appeal which helped raise enough funds to make it possible to acquire ownership of the structure which 64 years later is still their home.

The Dieters worshipped at Christ Lutheran Church, and the brothers Henry and Charles were charter members of the

Washington Hook and Ladder Company. They had a sister, Mrs. Clara Fisher, who died in 1932.

"Allie" was also a charter member of both the Patriotic Order Sons of America Camp and the International Order of Odd Fellows Lodge. He died on Jan. 18, 1937, aged 77 years. His wife, Caroline (Mader), a Jacksons Patch girl, died in 1923. They had five daughters, four of whom survived him: Mrs. Joseph (Helen) Thiel of Philadelphia, Edith, Bertha and Mrs. Howard

(Viola) Holman, Mahanoy City. The other daughter, Mrs. Roland (Anna) Hetler, died in 1932.

MENTION MAROONS to oldtime sports fans on the local scene and it will bring to mind the teams who wore the Maroon and Black of MCHS in days gone by.

But there was a time that the teams were equally well-known as "The Praying Miners." Back in 1923, Record-American sports editor Russ Green reported the origin of that title: