

MAHANoy CITY CHRONICLES/Researched by Lorraine Stanton

Sports celebrities of bygone eras

By BILL O'BRIEN
Herald writer

SOME VIGNETTES of people who helped put Mahanoy City on the sports map in days gone by, but whose accomplishments may be little known among local folk in this quasiquintennial year:

TENNIS WAS big in Mahanoy City back in the early 1930s, and Tom Noonan, the prominent late attorney, was a king of the court.

This item from August 1933 paints the picture:

"The king is dead! Long live the king!

"Lawton Van Buren, striving for his second championship, went down to defeat before the potent racquet of Tom Noonan at the East End Park court yesterday.

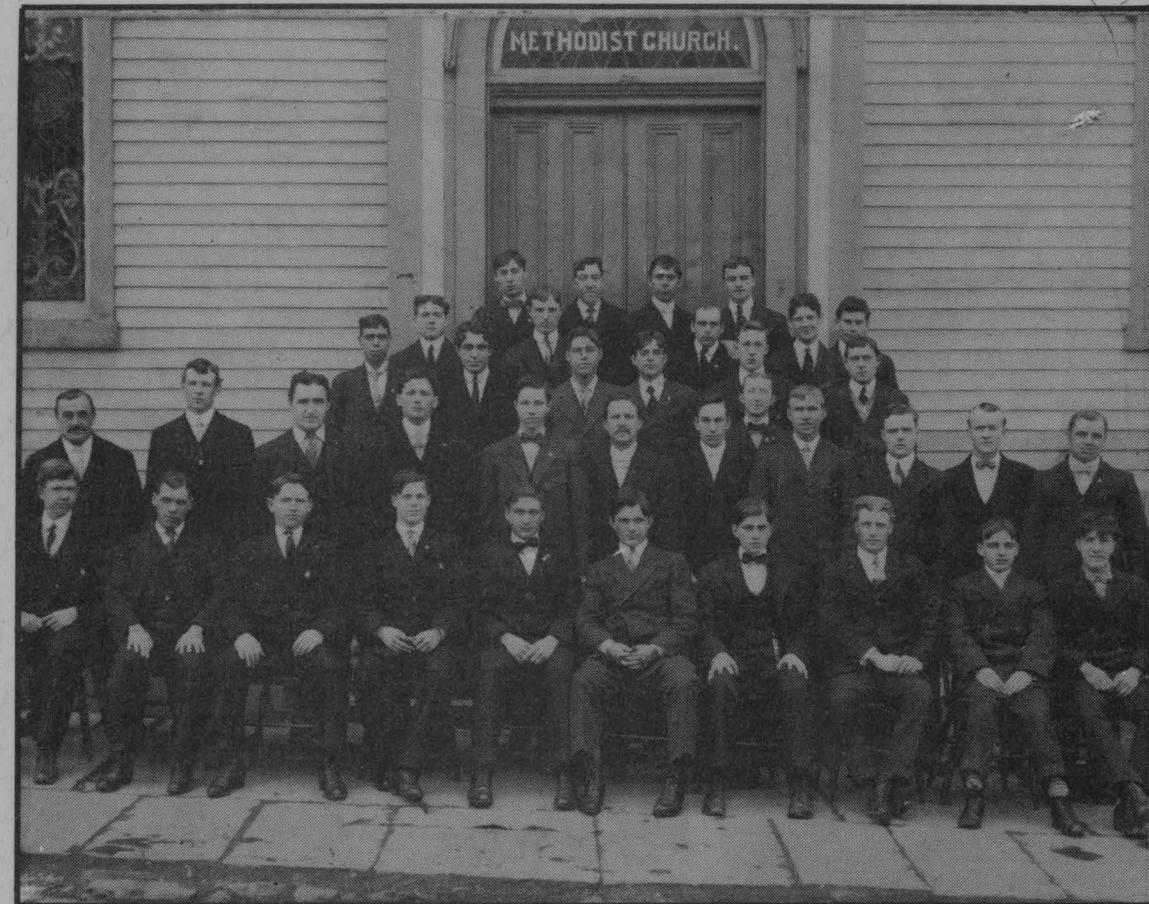
"Noonan continued a campaign which he started two years ago when he lost to Van Buren. From that point, Noonan changed his strategy. Instead of playing one style against all opponents, he changed tactics at any point in any given match, and was able to confound the foe.

"Van Buren has been the nemesis of many fine tennis players, sending them from the court talking to themselves. No matter how hard they laced the ball, the ex-champ could absorb it like a sponge and push the foe back to the point where he could deliver the placement shot for which he is noted.

"Noonan was satisfied to play the ball back easily until he forced Van Buren into an error. As a result, the ball was played and returned innumerable times before the point was made.

"Noonan won the first set, 6-3. In the second set, he uncorked a smashing ace which unnerved Van Buren, but like a true champion he adjusted and began to return like clockwork until the wily Noonan once again changed pace and took the second set, 6-2.

"Never quitting, Van Buren started a drive and led five games to four as Noonan appeared to be tiring. However,



CHURCHMEN OF YORE — Mahanoy City men took their religion seriously back in the good old days. These Bible scholars of 80 years ago were members of the Primitive Methodist Sunday School. There are no

Noonan rallied to knot the count at 5-5, then edged in front at 7-6 until he sent a perfect shot into the corner to wrap up the title.

"All honor to the new champ but a few plaudits to the retiring king who, in his quest to retain the title, brushed aside a series of foes who figured in the money. There can be no doubt that whenever tennis in Mahanoy city is discussed, his name will be brought forward and some statement of his ability and accomplishments will be forthcoming.

"Noonan has fairly earned

himself the title of champion, and upon his shoulders Mahanoy City's hopes in the tennis world are pinned. After the match, he was presented with a tennis sweater by the park management."

Tom Noonan had a long career in law and government service ahead of him following his tennis triumph of more than 50 years ago, but he was always made time for a session of tennis and/or handball, even when he was well advanced into the ranks of senior citizenry.

identities to go with the photo, but if some of the PM decedents of today look closely, they may be able to spot an ancestor.

(Bill Kates photo)

for 75 years to enjoy a brief sojourn with old friends.

"It was at the turn of the century that Fen was the best shot in Pennsylvania, and he has the medals to prove it. Art Fink, statistician for Berks County trapshooters and a national authority on the subject, reported 10 years ago that Fen had the highest lifetime average among registered trapshooters in the country.

"Despite his 80 years, Fen is still powdering the clays. His eye is not as true and his grip not as steady as they were decades ago, but he's still good enough to stir envy among many a young gunner."

MIKE MURPHY is another sports figure who placed Mahanoy City in the world sports spotlight through his role as a coach of U. S. olympians and one of the nation's all-time great track and field mentors.

A native of Mahanoy, Murphy coached for years at Penn and is credited with the success of the U.S. athletes in the 1900 Olympic Games in Paris. He coached the team and was mainly responsible for the string of medals they won.

One of the team members was Walter Drumheller of Sunbury, who was a track star at Penn. His recollections were published in the Evening Herald back in 1956 on the occasion of the Olympic Games in Melbourne.

He recalled: "Murph conducted the tryouts at Franklin Field, Philadelphia. I made it as a runner, posting 1:53 in the 8:80 and 49:03 in the 440. The team was made up of athletes from Penn, Georgetown, Columbia, Syracuse and Chicago. Murph conducted workouts daily aboard ship on the 13-day trip abroad. Training regulations were observed to the letter. We were in the best physical condition of our lives."

He said the team participated in a warmup meet during a stopover near London before crossing the channel to France.

LIZZIE STRIDE, born and

raised in Mahanoy City, was a girl whose athletic ability and stamina were on par with most professional male athletes.

Not much is known about Lizzie, but a sportswriter for one of the New York tabloids wrote a column about her some years back. He said she had the build of an Amazon and more talent than many of the men then playing in the majors.

She played with an all-female team that toured with a New York Yankees club during off-season to play novelty exhibition games. Lizzie, according to the writer's account, was a slugger who could have made the regular Yankees' roster, had she been of the opposite gender.

CHRONICLES received a letter from Jane Silliman Minchoff of Orwigsburg commenting on the recent biographical piece about Edward S. Silliman, her grandfather. She commented:

"It was very gratifying to see that he was given recognition after so many years. From what I was told many years ago, he was a man of humor, great generosity and religious enough to satisfy his wife, Sariah."

From her personal family genealogy, Mrs. Minchoff supplies some info to update the data which Chronicles gleaned from old Schuylkill County history volumes:

"James Silliman was not the first one to arrive in this country. Thomas had come over with his wife, Agnes, in 1727. They were with the Hunter settlement at Forks of the Delaware. He and his son were prominent in the Revolutionary War and were on the Committee of Correspondents.

"Edward S., born Nov. 4, 1864, continued the works of his father and was not more interested in Pottsville than Mahanoy City. He belonged to the local organizations including one of the fire companies. He was very interested in the East End Park and gave very generously and anonymously to local drives. I am sure had you known him you would have liked him."