

MAHANOY CITY CHRONICLES/Researched by Lorraine Stanton

Mahanoy women owe her a debt...

By BILL O'BRIEN
Herald writer

ANY MAHANOY woman who goes to the poll to cast a ballot on election day owes a vote of thanks to Dr. Harriet Evans. She was one of the local pioneers who put her status on the line to fight for the cause for women's suffrage.

As a leader of the movement, she helped organize a local Equal Franchise Club in 1915 and served as its first vice president.

Whenever the subject of women's voting rights arose, she was there to lend support. Thanks to the lobbying, agitation and leadership of Dr. Evans and others like her, the right to vote was granted to women when the 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution became effective on Aug. 26, 1920.

The general election of Nov. 2, 1920, marked the first time that women voted. The history-making ladies who were first in line to cast ballots in Mahanoy City on that morning were:

—First Ward, First Precinct, Cecilia Murtin.

—First Ward, Second Precinct, Mrs. McCarthy, janitress at the Mahanoy street school.

—Second Ward, Mrs. Olive Blew.

—Third Ward, Mrs. Peter Foley.

—Fourth Ward, Mrs. John D. Riley.

—Fifth Ward, First Precinct, Mrs. Philip Leahy.

—Fifth Ward, Second Precinct, Mary Witmer.

The right to vote was not the only legacy which Dr. Harriet Evans left the feminine gender in Mahanoy City. It was through her efforts that the Order of Eastern Star came to town. She was the founder of Puritan Chapter 156.

Harriet Evans was born in Gilberton and graduated from the schools of Mahanoy Township in 1903. She spent a year in Brown Preparatory School and four years in Philadelphia Women's Medical College where she received her MD in 1908. After a year in residency at Women's Hospital she came to Mahanoy City to start her practice.

Harriet was not the only physician in the Evans family.

Her sister, Florence, also received an MD from Women's Medical College but never practiced in this area. She was married in 1914 in Hagerstown, Md., to Paul L. Snyder, a former Mahanoy City resident.

Parents of the sister physicians were Daniel Dillman Evans (born at Llewellyn in 1859) and Hannah Fox (native of Gilberton). The couple had a son, Walter D. Evans who was a popular lad about town.

C. FRED BECK was the fifth and last president of Mahanoy City's oldest bank, the First National.

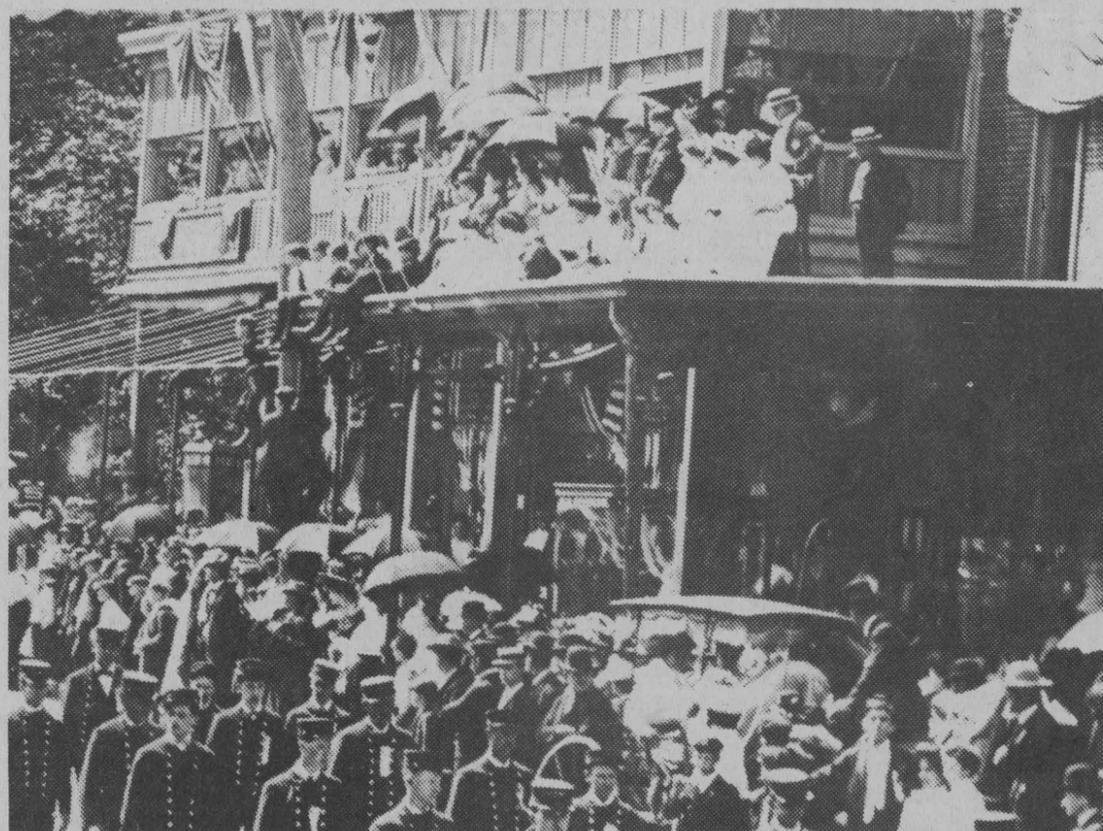
He came here from Elysburg in August 1920 to take over as bank cashier. Ten years later he was elected president, an office in which he only four predecessors since the bank was founded in 1864: Abraham Focht, Nicholas Balliet, Edward S. Silliman Sr. and Edward S. Silliman Jr.

When Mr. Beck assumed the presidency in 1930 the First National was in the process of erecting a new granite-faced building at the northeast corner of Main and Centre streets. Unfortunately, the Great Depression was already starting to bankrupt many of the nation's lending institutions and First National would be one of them. By June 1937 there the First National Bank of Mahanoy City was gone. By direction of the U. S. Comptroller of Currency, its assets and liabilities were taken over by its neighbor across the street, Union National, which later moved its headquarters into the First National building (now occupied by Pennsylvania National).

Banking was a family affair for C. Fred Beck. His father, Charles F., was president of the Cressona First National.

C. Fred was born in Cressona in 1889 and received a degree from Franklin and Marshall Academy. He taught five years in Cressona schools before joining his father's bank staff as a clerk in 1910. In 1916 he became cashier of the First National Bank of Elysburg and remained there until the Mahanoy City bank beckoned him in 1920.

He also became a director of the First National Bank of



BIRD'S-EYE VIEW — There was no spot like the roof of a sidewalk awning from which to view a parade in Mahanoy City of yore. Catch the comfortable vantage point enjoyed by these men (in straw hats), women (with parasols) and boys (in knickers) gazing down upon the uniformed firemen passing in review. Wonder if any of those lads with legs

dangling over the roof edge became excited and fell? The roofed-cart at bottom right appears to be the inevitable street vender. Next time you take a stroll around Mahanoy, see if you can spot any of the old sidewalk awnings. A few are still around.

(Bill Kates photo)

Nuremberg when it opened in the fall of 1924.

One of C. Fred Beck's lasting contributions to Mahanoy City is the Rotary Club, which he helped to organize and served as president. He also was a past master of the local F&AM Lodge, and is one of the "absent brothers" remembered each night at ritual time in the local Elks Lodge, where his name is engraved on the scroll of past exalted rulers.

WELDON was a name known to hundreds of mine workers and hundreds of school students in Mahanoy City during the early decades of the current century. Michael was a mine foreman

and his daughter, Mary, was a teacher.

Michael was born in 1860 at New Castle, Del., son of Irish immigrant James Weldon. The family lived briefly at Mount Laffee (1862), Big Mine Run (1865) and at Locust Summit where Michael worked in the breaker as an eight-year-old slatepicker.

At age 11 he was old enough to work in the mines and eventually became a full-fledged miner. His knowledge of the trade earned him a position as fireboss at North Mahanoy Colliery in 1897, and inside foreman in 1904.

He was married to Margaret Kelly of Locustdale and one of

their six children, Mary, became a school teacher in Mahanoy City. Another, Nellie, became the bookkeeper for the F. W. Woolworth store. The other children were Rose, Marguerite, Bernard and James.

ONE OF THE popular taverns where east-enders slaked their thirsts during the early decades of the present century was Witmer's Cafe at 1301 E. Mahanoy St.

When Martin Witmer opened the business there in 1905, Mahanoy street was not the quiet thoroughfare it is today. Any Mahanoyite born before the 1950s can recall when Mahanoy street was the main (in fact, the only)

traffic artery leaving the east end of town. And Martin Witmer's saloon was at the busiest corner of that route.

Martin was a cousin of Charles D. Kaier whose mother was Crescentia Witmer. Both families came from Baden, Germany, a region where the making of fine beers had attained the peak of excellence.

Martin was born on Nov. 28, 1854, and learned the brewing trade at Baden. He came to America in October 1885 and went to Dushore, Sullivan County, where a cousin, Andrew Kaier, was in the beer business. Four months later he came to Mahanoy City and joined the staff of the Kaier Brewing Company. However, he stayed only until May 1886 when he left for New York to meet the ship bringing his wife, Mary (Maier), and their children, Blasius, Charles and Susan, from Germany. Seven other children were born in Mahanoy City.

The family remained in New York briefly, taking up farming at Katonah, West Chester County, about 30 miles from the city. Seven months later they came to Mahanoy City and became permanent residents as of 1887.

Martin was associated with the Kaier Brewery until 1901 when he went into business for himself as the local distributing agency for the Rettig Brewery in Pottsville. He gave up the agency in 1905 to open his cafe at the northeast corner of 13th and Mahanoy streets. He ran the bar until his death on Dec. 20, 1913, age 59 years.

His two oldest sons also were involved in the beer business. Blasius was the local agent for the Libery Brewery of Tamaqua, and Charles was local agent for the celebrated Feigenspan beer. The oldest girl, Susan, married Herbert Evans.

The Mahanoy-born Witmers were Theresa, who died in 1906; Josephine, wife of John Nolter; Martin, John, Mary (she was one of the first women to cast a ballot in town when women received the right to vote in November 1929) Herman and Matthew.

Bring back the days of Martin Witmer and beers like Kaier's, Rettig's, Liberty and Feigenspan!