

MAHANOY CITY CHRONICLES/Special edition

Patriotism a hallmark of parish

(NOTE: This is the last of a three-part series on Saint Fidelis Parish history compiled by the late pastor, Dr. Charles F. Keller.)

PATRIOTISM has been a hallmark of the people of Saint Fidelis Church throughout the parish existence.

In every war fought by the United States, the sons of Saint Fidelis have responded to the nation's cause.

The parish was noted founded until two years after the Civil War erupted (1861-65), but the Saint Fidelis honor roll numbers 13 men who answered the call of President Lincoln to help preserve the Union.

The most prominent member on that roster of Yankee soldiers was Charles D. Kaier, the pioneer brewery man who signed the petition for borough incorporation and started manufacturing his famous beer the very same year that Mahanoy City Borough and Saint Fidelis Parish began their history.

Another soldier on the list was John Steck, one of the pioneer settlers of Jacksons Patch. Tradition among oldtimers from Jacksons stated that because of his service to his country, Steck was granted rights to a tract of ground at the eastern end of Jacksons where he built a homestead later occupied by the Udites family until the last days of the patch.

Other Boys in Blue from Saint Fidelis were John Becker Sr., Jacob Britz, Evan Evans, Anthony Klingler, Lawrence Long, Peter Meihle, Alfred Spotts, Joseph Streisel, Alfred Schutt, Christopher Weier and Gerard Welter.

Two of these old vets are buried in the old parish cemetery where markers identify them as Anthony Klingler (Klinger) and Edward Shutt (Alfred Schutt). Both are listed as having served as privates in the Sixth Regiment.

WHEN SPAIN declared war on the United States on April 24, 1898, a dozen parishioners from Saint Fidelis Church rallied to the country's cause.

The war lasted only eight months, concluding with the peace treaty signed at Paris on Dec. 19, 1898. The honor roll at Saint Fidelis Church lists the names of these 12 who marched off to serve the Red, White and Blue:

John Becker, Joseph Bertzel, George Britz, Peter Dennis, George Eichman, Frank Feichtner, Richard Fritz, Francis Grow, George Joseph, William Sticher, John Welter and George Wilds.

WORLD WAR I was a time of agonizing sadness for the people of Saint Fidelis, whose sentiments were caught in the middle of this devastating conflict between the beloved land of their ancestors,

and the new land which they loved equally by birth and adoption.

But the German Catholics of Mahanoy City left no doubt about their choice of loyalty. Father Keller, who was 20 years old and a seminary student when the U.S. entered the war, reported in his memoirs: "Time and again from the altar the parishioners were urged to support the government of the land of their birth and prove their loyalty by buying Liberty Bonds and giving generously to the Red Cross and similar causes, while at the same time praying unceasingly for lasting peace."

The pastor, Rev. William Hammeke, a native of Germany, set the example by investing parish funds in Liberty Bonds, and the parish societies did likewise. Parish women and girls in the school did their bit by sewing for the Red Cross.

The most inspiring outpouring of patriotism came from the young men who marched off to war. The World War I honor roll contained the names of 62 men, one of whom died in the service: John Gastager.

Four of them served in the navy: John Ginthner, Leo Hoffman, John Frick and John Weyer.

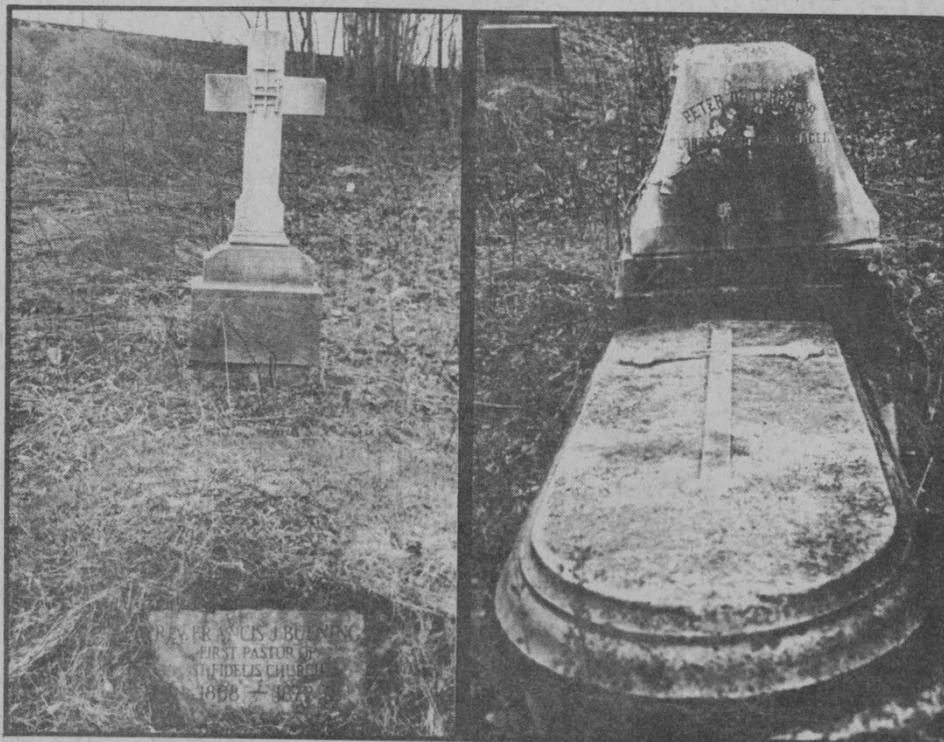
Four attained the rank of army sergeant: Joseph Adam, Frank Both, George Heffner and Charles Hoffman.

Army privates were: Albert and Charles Becker, John Both, Fred Brocker, George Christman, John Collins, Arthur Delpiaz, Charles and Walter Dennis, Herbert Eichman, Joseph Flail, Joseph Flearl, George Forster, Robert Fowler, Joseph Frick, William Goodman, Philip Jacobs, Marcus Joseph, Alphonsus and Francis Keim, Thomas Killian, Joseph, Charles and John Litsch, Henry Kneib, Thomas Kreitzer, Joseph Litsch.

Joseph Matruder, Fred Martens, Christopher Meyer, Edward, Frank and John Meyers, Joseph Miehme, William Moore, Walter Myer, Jacob Neider, Henry Petritsch, Lois Piz, Luke Salvador, Frank Schukis, Frank and Fred Schumacher, John Steck, Philip Streisel, William Swade, George Testen, John Unsinn, Charles and Joseph Weber, Joseph Wirtz, John and Martin Wittmer.

WORLD WAR II saw an even greater demonstration of patriotism as 81 men and one woman donned uniforms. Two of them, Sgt. John H. Brocker and Pvt. James Post, paid the supreme sacrifice. Brocker was killed in a bomber crash in the Yukon Oct. 16, 1943. Post was killed in France on July 26, 1944. The lone servicewoman was Marie Britz. Two of the men, Fred Schumacher and William Schuster, attained the rank of lieutenant.

The other men were John Adam, John and Joseph Babin-sky, Joseph Becker, Robert



PIONEERS AT REST — These graves in the old Saint Fidelis Cemetery are the resting places of two parish pioneers. At left is grave of Rev. Joseph Beuning, first pastor of the parish (1868-74) who has reposed there for 116 years. At right is the tomb of Peter Otterbach who was a founder of both the parish and the borough. He was treasurer of the committee who formed the parish and a signer of the petition for borough incorporation. Otterbach owned a hotel in the first block of East Centre street, north side, and built the mansion still standing at Eighth and Centre streets to serve as home for what he must have dreamed would be a large family, but his wife and young child before the building was finished and he sold the mansion to the

Blum, William Bonenberger, August Brentari, Edward Britz, James Brocker, John, Peter and Joseph Bross, Norbert and William Burke, Engle Delpas, James and Walter Dennis, William Dochney, Alfred and Francis Flaim, Joseph and William Forster, Henry Giesen, George Ginthner, Joseph Grady, George Heffner Jr., Pierce Holzenthaler, John Hollerback, Francis and Fred Keim, Leon Kinsinger, John Keller, John Klein, Fred Klitsch, Joseph Lashinsky, John Lavelle, Paul Lipp, Andrew, Joseph and Thomas Long, Joseph and Robert Maher, George McGeehan, Francis McNelis, Harry Martens, William Moore John and Joseph Nolter, Benjamin Pedrirani, Frank and Thomas Petritsch, James Polli,

Charles Jr., Charles H. and William Post, John and Paul Purcell, Joseph Quinn, Edward and George Rischar, James and William Rooney, Joseph

Salvadore, Warren Schaeffer, Joseph, Paul and Robert Schukis, James and Paul Stephany, Peter Stief, Charles Streisel, Lawrence Troy, Donald Webb, Christopher Weyer, James Whalen, Matthew Wittmer and Harry Youch.

THE KOREAN WAR took the life of another young parishioner, Vincent Long, who was killed in action on March 15, 1951.

The honor roll for that conflict includes Cpl. Harry Forster (wounded), Cpl. James Forster, George Long, Charles and Joseph Lieberman, William Polli, Sgt. John Semanko, Joseph Testen, John Writz, John Nolan, Joseph Rooney, George and Paul Forster.

Vietnam was another war that saw young men from Saint Fidelis answer the call to uniform. Unfortunately, Father Keller died in 1967 and no one took up his work to compile a list of parishioners who served in that war.

Kaier family. The German inscription on his tombstone says he was born in Reimshagen and died on August 14, 1882, age 68 years. There are no markers to indicate whether his wife and son are buried beside him, nor is it known how many other pioneers may be resting in the cemetery as the plot is a shambles with tombstones overturned, buried and undecipherable, and graves grown over with briars and scrub oak. Until last year the site was obscured by a thicket of sassafras saplings growing on and between the graves, but most of these were removed in a volunteer effort by Gino Capone. The cemetery plot, dating from 1865, is situated at the southeast corner of Saint Canicus Cemetery whose parishioners donated the ground to Saint Fidelis Church.

(Evening Herald/Emil Yenchick)

SPIRITUALITY is another attribute with which Saint Fidelis Parish was richly blessed.

This is evident in the number of young parishioners who entered religious life: nine priests, one brother and 26 nuns.

Rev. Anthony Ostheimer for years served as editor of the Philadelphia Archdiocesan paper, the Catholic Standard and Times. He was ordained a secular priest for the Philadelphia Archdiocese by Dennis Cardinal Dougherty, as were Rev. Joseph Ostheimer and Father Keller.

Jacob Ecker, Charles and Frank Meyer became Benedictine priests, while John Lipp and Joseph Moore were ordained in the Augustinian Order.

Peter Klingler became a brother.

Rose Adam in 1919 entered the contemplative convent of the Holy Ghost Sisters in Philadelphia.

Catherine Haas, Teresa and Frances Unsinn joined the Im-

maculate Heart Order.

Dorothy Kinsinger became a Dominican nun, and Catherine Kettner joined the Order of Joseph Joseph and served as superior of the nuns who performed domestic services at Saint Charles Seminary, Overbrook.

Twenty girls entered the Sisters of Saint Francis, Glen Riddle, the order who taught in the parish school: Mary Brown, Catherine Ecker, Mary Castager, Mame Frye, Elizabeth and Catherine Nieder, Josephine, Anna, Barbara and Elizabeth Meyer, Barbara and Mary Post, Barbara Schire, Dorothy Wirtz, Gertrude Portner, Agnes Steiff, Elizabeth Schuster, Winifred Evans, Mary Moratti and Catherine Ostheimer.

Although he was never assigned to Saint Fidelis Parish, Father Gustav Stauss was so fond of the people here that he adopted it as his own. He was ordained in Germany in August 1863 and came to America shortly afterward. For some years he was chaplain at Saint Joseph's Hospital, Reading, and made it an annual custom to come to Mahanoy city each year to preach the sermon for the Feast of Saint Fidelis. When he observed his golden jubilee as a priest on August 15, 1913, he honored the parish by celebrating the jubilee here. And when he died on Feb. 29, 1916, he chose Saint Fidelis Cemetery for his final resting place.

SAINT FIDELIS Church in the beginning served not only Mahanoy City. It was the also the mother church for German Catholics of Shenandoah. Some Shenandoah residents were among the group 61 who gathered on August 2, 1863, to launch the founding of Saint Fidelis.

By 1870 the Shenandoah congregation had grown to 35 families and they founded Holy Family Parish. They opened their church in 1870 but had no pastor until 1874 when Rev. Marus Graetzer was appointed. During the four previous years the parish was served by the Saint Fidelis clergy.

The strong Catholic faith brought to Mahanoy City by these German immigrants was rooted in the eighth century work of the great English missionary, Saint Boniface, whose preaching and example converted the Teutonic peoples of central Europe.

Today, Saint Fidelis Parish has no resident pastor. As was the case in the days before Mahanoy City's boroughhood, the parish is served by the clergy of Saint Canicus Parish.

And with the shortage of priests becoming more acute and the borough's population decreasing each year, there's little prospect of any change in the status quo.

At its peak in the 1910 census, Mahanoy had 15,936 residents. As of 1985, the U.S. Census Bureau listed only 5,650. That places the population only 117 above the 5,533 reported for the borough's first census in 1870.