

MAHANOY CITY CHRONICLES

Ragazinsky's and Noonan's

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Herald writer

REMEMBER the soft drink called 4-U? How about soft drink flavors like lime-rickey, raspberry, strawberry or orange-pineapple?

You can't buy soft drinks in those unusual flavors here anymore but 30 and 40 years ago they were available from the Ragazinsky Bottling Works at D and Market streets.

Joe Ragazinsky's beverages were among the most popular in the area from the 1930s through the 1960s. He became familiar with the bottling business during the latter 1920s while working for the Larkin bottling plant in town but when the Depression hit, Joe found himself without a job. Being unemployed turned out to his advantage, for it prompted him to try his hand as a soda maker.

Despite the gloomy economic conditions then prevailing, Joe believed there was a market for a soft drink manufacturer who offered something different.

A big break came his way when he learned that the Frank Chmielowski bottling plant, 213 W. Market St., was available for leasing. The plant had been standing idle since Chmielowski left town in 1927.

In 1931, Joe Ragazinsky signed a three-year lease for the plant. It wasn't easy for a new manufacturer to build a clientele, but young Joe Ragazinsky worked long hours by himself, mixing, bottling, seeking customers and delivering his product. His delivery vehicle was an old coupe.

As the public discovered the difference in the quality and variety of Ragazinsky's soft drinks, the demand grew. The three-year lease on the Chmielowski plant was renewed for another three years and by 1937 Joe needed two trucks to keep up with the deliveries.

It was time to think about having his own plant and he made the move at the beginning of 1937. He purchased ground from the Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company at the southwest corner of D and Market streets and proceeded with construction. His first batch of soda at the new plant was turned out on August 25, 1937.

FOR THE next three decades Ragazinsky's soda was a brand name beverage in Mahanoy City and vicinity. In addition to the old

standard flavors like orange, cherry, lime, grape, cream, root beer, birch beer, ginger ale and lemon-lime, he added chocolate, grapefruit, pale dry, lemon, pineapple, orange-pineapple, lime-rickey, sarsaparilla, strawberry, and raspberry in bottles, plus birch beer in a keg.

During the 1950s, Joe decided to add a new facet to his business. At Centre and D street he constructed a new building and opened an ice cream parlor.

The future looked promising but the picture soon changed radically. Jus ahead was an economic climate that proved to be worse than the 1930s. The permanent collapse of the anthracite industry cut the roots out of the town's economy. Masses of people moved away and with them went many businesses which had prospered for decades.

Today, the Ragazinsky bottling plant and ice cream parlor are occupied by other businesses. The name of Ragazinsky also is gone from the scene along with its distinctive soft drinks that were the favorites of their generation.

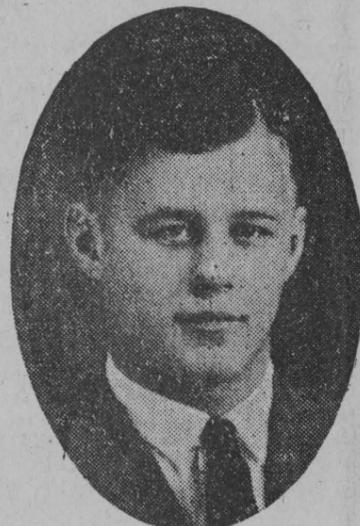
NOONAN BROTHERS conducted one of the best-known stores in midtown Mahanoy during the first half of the current century.

Although the company faded away 37 years ago, the Noonan building is still a landmark as the tallest in the center of town. The four-story structure is unique for its large plate glass display windows fronting Centre street on each floor. Folks passing on the street could see displays of furniture on every floor.

The lot on which the building stands at 10-12 E. Centre is itself an historic spot, having been the site where the town's first permanent resident, Emanuel Boyer, conducted his Mahanoy House hotel, built in the mid-1850s, where the town's first male child, William Boyer, was born on the second floor on Feb. 15, 1858.

Many a home in the Mahanoy Valley was furnished by furniture from Noonan's, and the fact that some of the items are still in use is testimony to the quality. Mrs. Dorothy (Dresh) Hines of Saint Clair (her family was featured in a previous Mahanoy Chronicle) reported that one of the prize items in her home is a table which her mother acquired at Noonan's prior to World War I.

THE BROTHERS, Thomas B., Frank J. and Austin E., were



Joseph Ragazinsky

Flavor king

Unique flavors were the formula which brought great success to the Ragazinsky Bottling Company. The bottling plant, above right, is shown after it was built in 1937. Below is the mixing room where Joseph Ragazinsky produced his beverages.

among Mahanoy City's best known citizens. Frank had the distinction of serving a term as county treasurer and two terms as U.S. Marshal for the Philadelphia District.

The brothers spent their youth in Saint Nicholas Patch where the name of Noonan was well known for almost a century. The parents, Thomas and Mary, parents were early settlers in Ellangowen where two of their six boys were born before they moved to Saint Nicholas during the 1860s.

The father died of injuries suffered in a mine accident, leaving his widow to raise the children. The boys were under 10 years old when they went to work picking slate in the breaker. Their early education consisted of instruction imparted by their mother, a teacher before marriage, who taught a class of patch boys in the living room of her home.



Austin left the colliery in the mid-1880s to join David Adamson in the partnership of Noonan & Adamson who ran the Saint Nicholas General Store.

In 1889, Austin was joined by brothers Tom and Frank in the establishment of the Excelsior Tea Company stores in Mahanoy City and Mount Carmel. Later they consolidated the two stores into one at Saint Nicholas and also began selling furniture.

The business was conducted at the patch until 1904, when they acquired the former Boyer property at 10-12 E. Centre street and constructed their building.

FRANK WAS the first of the brothers to pass away, his death having occurred on his 51st birthday, May 17, 1922. He resided at 434 E. Centre St.

As a boy he had a desire for education beyond what he received from his mother. After completing a 12-hour shift at the colliery he attended night school

classes which were offered by the public school district for men and boys who had to work. Thus he acquired enough knowledge to pass the test for a teacher's certificate. He took a teaching job in the public schools at Nuremberg and later taught in the Mahanoy Township schools, including the old high school at Coles.

Frank's interest in politics led him to a position of leadership in the Schuylkill County Democratic Party. He won the election for county treasurer in 1900 and served one term after which he returned to teaching.

When Woodrow Wilson took office as president in 1914 he appointed Frank to the office of U.S. Marshal for the Philadelphia District. The outbreak of World War I made the marshal's office one of the most important in the federal government and the name of Marshal

Frank Noonan became well-known to newspaper readers throughout the Philadelphia region.

After leaving the office of marshal he ran for Congress and won the Democratic nomination in the spring primary, but death intervened six months before the November election.

At the time of his demise he was president of the Union National Bank and held life memberships in the Pennsylvania and National Education Associations.

He was survived by his wife, the former Mary Littlehailes of Saint Nicholas, and three brothers Tom and Austin in Mahanoy City and Jim in Saint Nicholas. The other two brothers died years earlier.

AUSTIN NOONAN died on April 17, 1933, leaving his wife, the former Ann Horan, and eight children. He resided at 78 S. Main St. and was a member of the Union National Bank board.

One of his sons, Mark, would become Mahanoy City's 45th Gold Star in World War I, having been killed in action on Dec. 29, 1944.

Austin's other children at the time of his death were Dr. Frank and Attorney John, both in Philadelphia; James, Thomas and Alice, all attending college; Austin, at home; and Mary, wife of Dr. A. P. Murray of Girardville.

THOMAS NOONAN, last of the partners, died on July 28, 1941. He lived at 20 W. Mahanoy St.

He was born in Ellangowen and worked at age seven as a slate picker and age nine as a mule driver.

His wife was the former Josephine Heffner of Saint Nicholas, and they had two children: Thomas, who was a Mahanoy City funeral director for years, and Mary, who was married to an Allentown funeral director, Charles Becker.

The death of Tom passed the store ownership on to the care of the heirs who continued the operation for 10 more years.

By 1951, the children of the founders were pursuing their own careers and the decision was made to close shop.

The Record-American summed up the community's sentiment in bidding goodbye to an old friend: "Announcement of the closing of Noonan Brothers store is received with regret, as through the years it held the esteem of regional residents."