

A Lancaster City Boy of the Gay Nineties

Abner McMichael Eyde,
with Miriam Eyde Bixler

In 1891, when I was ten years old, my Dad, Eli Eyde, was transferred from his Columbia job as telegrapher for the Pennsylvania Railroad to the tower at Lancaster on North Prince Street between Walnut and Lemon Streets. Mother and he moved from Marietta to West Lemon Street near Lancaster Avenue, with seven of their children.

Clate, already married, had moved to Harrisburg to work for the Pennsy there. Margaret took a country school, Isabelle worked as a cashier in a department store, John got a job in the office of the freight station, Miriam apprenticed to a dressmaker, and Will, Nan and I entered the city schools.

The city was a wonderful, new place for me. And one of the best spots in the city was Eshelman's Feed Mill. Maybe I started going there because the Doctor said I should hang around horses — the smell would do my weak lungs good. I know I lived at the mill for five days once when I decided to run away from home.

Mother knew where I was, for the mill boys told John, who worked at the Walnut and Prince Streets freight office. The mill fellows fed me and made a good bed with feed bags and horse blankets. Mother couldn't stand it more than five days though, and sent John to tell them to chase me home. She never said a cross word when I came into the kitchen, just dragged the wooden washtub in, filled it with hot water, handed me a piece of lye soap and said "Scrub."

But let me tell you how Eshelman got started with his feed mill. Jonas Eby owned a feed store on North Queen Street where Eshelman Feed Company is now. When his son got out of Yale — and that was something in those days — he went into the wholesale business and sold out to Christian C. Reedmiller. (He was Detective Cogley's grandfather). Reedmiller took in a man, name of Hagey who owned a rolling mill there a little in from West Walnut Street on North Prince Street — a tobacco warehouse now, I think. Well, Reedmiller left the place and after awhile so did Hagey; and Eshelman took over.

When I was a kid Eshelman had two drivers, Abe Breitigan and Walt Shaub, who'd let me help deliver with them on Saturday. I'd work all day draggin' the bags to the end of the wagon while they drove. We'd de-



Abner and Bertha Kautz Eyde

liver to stables and houses where folks kept cows. Lots of folks kept cows for there was no law against it in the city then. Not many in the West End though, just George Seigler and Jake Way on College Avenue where St Joe's [St. Joseph's Hospital] is now.

Ragmen were good customers, and Henry Shaub the contractor, too. He used six or eight horses on his wagon when he was hauling heavy pipe. And those horses ate feed!

Abe and Walt were kind to me. They not only put up with me, but shared their dinner from their pails and would treat me to waffles or soft pretzels when we met a vendor on the street.

(Note: When Abner was seventy-eight and Frank E. Eshelman near ninety they met in Dr. Harvey Seiple's office.— Abner frail and ailing, Mr. Eshelman looking very fit. Mr. Eshelman said "Abner you were a good

kid, full of fun but lazy as all get out." Abner, nettled a bit, replied, "I was just smart. No pay, no work!")

Thinking about horses reminds me of Jake Griel's old mule. Jake owned a huge brickyard from North Mary Street to beyond the John Reynolds Junior High School and north into the Seminary grounds. He'd get rid of his old brickyard mules when they couldn't work anymore. But one he hadn't the heart to sell and allowed it to spend its last days just wandering around the edges of the brickyard and feeding with the working mules.

We boys and our older brothers gave Old Man Griel plenty of trouble playing around those yards and he chased us plenty. Our John and one of the Cogley boys and I don't know how many other teen-agers hung around the corner of Lemon and Mary Streets. One night they were bored, broke and thirsty. Someone thought of the old mule at Griel's brickyard.

Late that night they sneaked into the yard, got the mule and led him down to Lamparter's Glue works at the other end of town. They sold him for a dollar and spent it on a keg of beer. No one would have been the wiser if the boys hadn't gotten cocky about how smart they'd been. Old Man Griel had been rip-roarin' mad when he discovered someone had stolen his old pet mule. Like boys will, they began giving each other a secret signal. They'd say "Hee-haw!" when they met on the street. Someone heard, got suspicious and told Griel. He went to the police and they hauled the gang in. Since mother was a good First Methodist member and a white ribbon girl and Dad sang in the choir there was the dickens to pay at our house — especially as Dad had costs to pay as well as John's part of the price of the mule.

[Note: Charles A. Griel, now eighty-five years old, and the only survivor of John Griel's thirteen children, recalled the mule-stealing in this slightly different version: "My brother Harv was managing the brickyard at the time. They had taken two mules in part payment of a bad debt on the building of the West End Reservoir in Buchanan Park; the reservoir gave way allegedly because of faulty construction. One of those mules was stolen, and we put Edwin M. Gerlach a, detective, on the job. The boys teased him something awful, and when he broke the case the authorities really 'piled it on.' The parents went to Harv and asked for help, and it cost him \$300 until he quashed the case."]

Funny things you remember as a kid! I always forgot to close the Lemon Street backyard gate and Mother used to go for me. One day she baked fresh cherry pies and put them to cool on the washbench right outside the kitchen door. A neighbor's dog came in and took a bite out of the pie before mother could chase him. When I got home Mother said what happened but didn't scold. But at dinner time she put that pie in front of me and made me eat it, every bit. I loved pie but that was the hardest thing I ever downed in my life — thinking of that dog messing around it. Afterwards John said Mother cut out that part and I hadn't eaten a bit the dog touched.

There was a good bunch of kids in that neighborhood. We had fun

playing all kinds of games in the streets in good weather. Rudy C. Lawrence and his family lived at West Lemon and Mary Streets. I played with his kids and we called him a "house dauber and window pane putter in" when we wanted to tease him. When his wife called the children she'd yell, "A Rufus and a Clarence and a John Griel Lawrence. All come to supper. Breakfast is over and you had your dinner." Yes, John was named after Griel who owned the brickyard. He was well thought of.

It was around that block that, on a bet, I chased your mother, Bertha Kautz to try to kiss her. We were about twelve then and the whole Kautz family was staying with their cobbler uncle Jake Kautz when they got back from the Denver, Colorado, silver rush. I never did catch up with her for that kiss until I met her again when we were about twenty. It was worth waiting for.

Next we moved to West Orange Street near Marietta Avenue for a year or so. On Marietta Avenue between Orange Street and Columbia Avenues, there was a little board shop run by "Brownie" who had both his legs off. I don't know how that happened. He'd tend his shop by "rutching along" on his rear along a long bench that ran the length of the regular counter and the candy counter. When he wanted to go out he'd manage to harness up his two goats to a little cart and away he'd go. We boys liked to watch him do it. We soon found out that he sold "penny plugs." He'd take a ten-cent plug of chewing tobacco and cut it into penny plugs and sell it to us kids. There was no law.

Police-baiting was one of our favorite games. It seems to me that in those days the cops were always fat. There was an especially big one on the Eighth Ward beat name of George B. Brown. Two patrolmen were assigned to each ward. We learned which house alleys were best to hide in when we saw the cops coming on their rounds. We'd throw stones after them and run like heck and they'd always chase us, but never caught us. Those fatties sure lost a lot of breath and all for nothing.

I went to Chestnut Street Grammar School and Hannah Finger was my teacher. She was a Tartar but she sure knew how to handle boys. Billy Furniss and his older brother (bright boys, the oldest got a fine job in Philadelphia with the **Saturday Evening Post**) went to school with me. Their father, Doc Joseph Furniss, had a house next to Miller's Livery Stable on Marion Street where he had a smallish practice. He was from the lower end of the county.

Well, Dad has asked Miller if I could hang around his stables (because of my bad cough) and Billy Furniss came in one day looking for me. He asked if I wanted to go along with him and his father to visit his father's sister in Fairfield, down the county.

I said, "I don't care." He said, "You'll have to get up early." We did, at four a.m. I remember Doc hung a lantern under the buggy so he could see the ruts in the narrow roads. That was considered quite a trip in those days.

Down there I saw something I never saw before — two eating tables

in the kitchen. At dinner I saw why. The colored help, a man and woman, ate at one and we ate at the other. That Jim Crow table was something different to me!

I liked circuses. There were two brothers in the Seventh Ward named Welsh who had a circus. Mike was the good-looker and the good-dresser of the two and he handled the outside like the posters and arrangements and stuff. The other one ran the show.

They'd started as kids practicing on homemade bars and things after they'd seen the acrobats in the traveling circuses. Then they charged the neighbor kids pins, then pennies to see their tricks and that's how they got started. Later they had little shows on the vacant lot at Locust and Rockland Streets. I sold soft pretzels to get the money to go and one time played hookey from school. I knew that next day they would have it on Jackie Way's lot (where J. F. Reynolds Junior High School is now) but I couldn't wait until it came nearer home, I had to see it the first day.

They didn't have elephants and wild animals even in big circuses then. The ponies were the thing. They were smart and beautiful too. And the dogs! There were always a lot of trained dogs and sometimes a monkey or two. But first there was always a parade.

The wagons that the big circuses moved into town were decorated in bright colors so they'd look good in a parade. The ones I liked best were some I saw that had nursery rhyme story pictures on them, like the "Old Woman in the Shoe."

I followed a parade one day to the circus grounds on the old Fair Grounds on the Harrisburg Pike. There used to be wandering roustabouts who weren't really attached to the circus but would hang around for a job. One struck me funny. He was sleeping against a wall of the house next to the field with his head against a pair of new shoes so no one could steal them.

One time I was on West King Street watching a circus parade and a clown called to me and asked me to run in a store there and buy him a pair of stockings. He tossed me some money and I did, and then ran like the dickens to catch up with him for he'd promised to give me a pass to the performance. But he kept ignoring me after I gave him the stockings and change, just ran around doing his act and wishing I'd get lost, but I didn't. I stuck right with him and missed my dinner at home and marched right along to McGrann's Park on New Holland Avenue where the circus was to be held. I followed him like a pennydog and I got my pass. Mother gave me "what for" 'cause I didn't make dinner.

When we lived on Lemon Street I played with a fellow name of Charlie Kirchgessner. Charlie had a sister who began running around with the fellows who came with the sideshows and circuses. Then she left town and joined up with one of the big shows. That circus came to Lancaster and when she visited her folks she saw me hanging around and gave me a pass to her side show. And by gum! Wasn't she the girl who disappeared in the disappearing act! You bet, circuses sure were fun.