

A Lancaster City Boy in the Gay Nineties, Part III*

by Abner McMichael Eyde
as told to Miriam Eyde Bixler

You want to know more about the business? Well, I've told you often enough how Fred F. Groff hired me when I was fourteen to hold a skittish horse while he embalmed a body. From then on it was the undertaking business for me!

But let me tell you how Fred got started. He'd gone to Millersville Normal School on horseback from his home near his folk's mill at Willow Street but instead of teaching he worked for his father, the miller Adam Groff of West Lampeter Township. Fred's brother John came home from the West where he'd worked in rolling mills so F. F.'s Dad left him go and hired John at the flouring mills for he knew the business better.

After working at different jobs in New York, Philadelphia and the West, F. F. decided that Lancaster County was the place for him. Fred married Edie (Edith) Fogel, the daughter of a retired Christiana undertaker.¹ I guess that's what gave them the idea of starting up in the business.

*Part I may be found in Vol. 69 No. 3, 1965 and Part II in Vol. 74 No. 3, 1970.

Fred and Edie built a three story building in Quarryville for a furniture store, repair shop and undertaker shop around 1892. I bet old man Fogel was in on that. F. F. hired Fred Conrad to help him but then the Boss got real sick. They say he was in a Philadelphia hospital for six months. It ended up that he went into voluntary bankruptcy.

In 1899 he came into Lancaster. I entered the picture in 1900. F. F. had originally planned to settle in Rohrerstown but Beyer,² a real old-fashioned lawyer who looked like Tutt in the **Saturday Evening Post** said, "Fred, why don't you stay in Lancaster and work Rohrerstown, too?"

"Rotes³ have Lancaster tied up," answered Fred.

"But you'll get to know your neighbors, then other people," said Beyer. Fred listened.

His old assistant from Quarryville, Fred Conrad, had gone to work for John Jones Watson,⁴ a S. Queen Street undertaker. F. F. hadn't been able to pay Conrad his back wages so that fellow would go to a case that F. F. had and try to attach the casket for re-sale. The Boss got 'round that by having the folks pay for the casket first off so then it belonged to them. Conrad later worked in Philadelphia. F. F. paid back every cent of his bankruptcy although he didn't have to.

Fred's first place in Lancaster was rented from Daddy Shaub.⁵ It was back of the drugstore on Manor Street across from Christ Lutheran Church. Daddy Shaub had a beautiful daughter we buried. She had diphtheria. F. F. bought the goodwill and equipment, but not the ice boxes, from Aunt Lydia and Uncle John Sheirich—no relation. They'd given up their undertaking business outside Rohrerstown at that big white house right up on the Marietta Pike before you get to Dorsea Road. Fred couldn't pay them much but he never forgot them. He got real fond of them and when they got pretty old and poor he gave them so much each month 'though he didn't owe them a red cent.

The Boss bought and moved into 439 W. Orange Street in 1900 but in 1901 he took over 234 up the street. It had rooms for the boarders that Mother (Edie) wanted to take in. It was already divided into many little rooms because it had been run by "Keemer the Cleaner's"⁶ mother as a rooming house.

We repaired and made furniture at both places. Freddy dressed in overalls and an old farmer's straw hat when doing it—so different from his undertaking black frock coat and high hat.

I'll never forget my first high silk hat. I sure was proud. You know it was the mark of a professional man. All the doctors and lawyers and preachers wore them. F. F. took me to "Hartman the Hatter." Hartman was a great go-getter. I bet the Boss paid about ten dollars for that hat.⁷

The Boss solved the shop space problem at 432 by buying a collapsible metal voting house from the city of Philadelphia. It had been used in a vacant lot there and was the size of a regular small house. At voting time it had been furnished with tables and booths. When we gave up repairing furniture we used it as a storehouse for caskets and put shelves up to the ceiling.

Hearses and Horses

In the early years of our business we hired hearses and drivers from Eli Powl's⁸ or Charlie Smith's⁹ livery stables. The drivers wore high hats and in cold weather covered their knees with buffalo robes, putting fur capes around their shoulders. They'd bring a fur cape for me, too, when I'd have to sit up there with them, outside the cab, on a long, windy drive. They got paid fifty cents a funeral.

Powl's provided the four passenger two-horse cabs for the mourners but colored folks couldn't afford those so they hired the smaller one-horse ones at the railroad station. Those cabbies, during a four-hour, four-preacher funeral would hunt a nearby saloon and pass the time there. Many a time F. F. would have to drive a cab to the cemetery because the cabbie was too drunk.

The first horse we owned was named Jack. Then came Colonel, Charlie, the balky horse (I don't remember his name) and at the last the matched blacks. Old Jack "scoured." We always had a blanket over the front of the buggy and when he raised his tail we raised the blanket.

Mother used to go along to lay out the dead if the family didn't want to. One day Jack couldn't pull us up a steep hill so F. F. drove and Mother and I pushed.

We ordered our first dead wagon from Rochester, New York. Mrs. Musser,¹⁰ who lived on N. Pine Street, told me that one day she had trouble getting her kids into dinner from sledding down Spruce Street hill. When they saw me driving up to our house with that dead wagon they were so scared they ran home but fast.

The wagon was delivered to us by train on a flat covered with canvass. It looked as big as a house and was really built for the New York undertakers who used two horses. No one thought that Old Jack could pull it, but he did.

Then the Boss heard that New York undertakers were buying covered hearses from Rochester. 'Til now we'd used the open dead wagon with a waterproof cover. He traveled to look them over and bought one. When it was delivered poor, skinny, old Jack looked like a jack rabbit harnessed to that bulky hearse but he managed somehow to get it home from the station. We realized that we needed another horse so we bought Colonel.

Old Jack and the dead wagon were kept at Jake Grimm's¹¹ boarding stable on W. Orange Street. When we got the new hearse and Colonel, F. F. bought property next to Grimm's and turned it into a stable for himself. Later he rebuilt it into a garage with an entrance on both W. Orange and Arch Streets and lots of storage space on the second floor. In the early 1920's Frank Futer¹² left his E. Chestnut Street garage and took over F. F.'s for him. I don't know if Frank ever bought it outright.

Colonel was a beautiful, chestnut horse. Clate Landis,¹³ Fred's cousin who was a horse dealer, brought him from the West. Clate conducted weekly sales of horses at the Franklin Hotel on N. Queen Street. One day he called the Boss and said, "Got a beauty. Just what you need. Bargain because of his rat tail." A rat tail is a thin, almost hairless tail except for the tuft at the end. We bought him.

Henry Weill,¹⁴ a local horsedealer, said, "Abner, that horse's got too much light under him (too long-legged) to make a funeral director."

Colonel's legs didn't seem muscular enough to pull but they sure did. He was large and handsome just like a parade horse. Folks always looked around at him. He was too big for a regular horse stall so we rented a box stall from Jake Grimm so he could lay [sic] down. All the family loved Colonel, and he was Mother's favorite of all the horses. When he got too old to work the Boss sold him to Lamparter's (The Conestoga Glue Works) and it seemed to me that Mother didn't speak to F. F. for weeks because she had wanted Colonel to be put out to pasture.

We bought Charlie, a bob-tailed bay, from Doc Shenk.¹⁵ The upper class used to bob their horses' tails. Sometimes they'd fold up the long tails and tie them with ribbons, especially in bad weather.

Charlie had a "hard mouth" and insisted on galloping. F. F. couldn't seem to break him. One day we left Laura Caldwell,¹⁶ the lady who did our laying out then, off at Rohrerstown at a home and we "let out" Charlie. We made him race until he was all tuckered out. Then we picked up Mrs. Caldwell and started home on the Marietta Pike. Charlie broke into a gallop. We had to sell him.

It was Charlie that F. F. rode when he was Marshal of the first Lancaster New Year's parade in 1909. They say there were five thousand marchers that day. Those first couple years those New Year's parades weren't half bad. The country boys came in to town and drove in them, decorating their horses and buggies. Not half bad! But then people got tired of fixing up floats, didn't want to waste the time and money. The Philadelphia parade was too much competition and so we had them only a couple of years. Danny Sheaffer,¹⁷ the butcher, was Marshal the second year. Don't know who was third, but George Erisman, the doll doctor, was in charge the fourth.



One time Weill had a horse sale at Jake Grimm's sales and boarding stables and the Boss got a good deal on a horse. When he hitched him to the hearse he balked like a donkey. Just didn't work out in funerals. Darn embarrassing!

The last horses we bought were a matched pair of blacks. We got them from the Boyertown casket company which had a breeding farm and sold especially to undertakers. They had to be sold when he got the auto-hearse.

Talk about transportation! We thought we had it but nowadays you just about fly about in a machine. The Boss contacted the Welsh-Detroit people about a chassis and instead of having a touring car put on top of it he ordered a hearse. He always was ahead of his time. He had special seats made to make a sedan out of it for his family to take a ride on Sundays. That hearse was used for a wagon to carry roughboxes and for funerals and everything else. We kept gasoline in a large tank with a spigot. It was poured from a smaller can into the auto tank through a funnel covered with a chamois. That took out the impurities.

In time we had mixed funerals, one or two motor cars and the rest buggies. That sure was hard on the machines. We never forgot to carry repair kits for the tires. Often we had to stop and use them during a funeral procession.

When F. F. bought the Maxwell touring car about 1910 it was a real curiosity¹⁸ around town. You didn't take a driver's test in those days. I'd taught myself to drive when we got the hearse and when at last we hired another embalmer, Ross Eyler, he just sat beside me once or twice to learn

You just up and wrote to Harrisburg for your license. I think it cost two dollars. It was a metal badge and said "Licensed Driver" on it. You pinned it on the lapel of your coat or, since it was the style to wear gauntlet gloves, most drivers pinned it on one of their long cuffs.

Churches would ask F. F. to donate the Maxwell and driver for their festivals and charge five cents a ride. Ross and I would alternate on driving them but when a request came from the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church over there at E. Strawberry and North Streets, we decided to both drive for just one half an hour each. I took the first half hour. Ross was stuck. He drove until he ran out of gas. Never had such good business at a festival!

We buried mostly in church graveyards and in time they'd get pretty full and the city ones moved further out for more room. The little graveyard at the colored Methodist church had this problem. So after a while the members solved it by dumping three feet of dirt on top of the three feet already covering the casket and then selling the lot all over again. After a while the authorities stepped in and stopped it.

The Help at "Misery Hall"

When the Groffs started out in Quarryville Hen McMichael used to help around the place. Remember how he later dressed in a white uniform and high white hat and sold homemade peppermint candy from a tray out in front of the Colonial Theater? Well, Hen baby-sat sometimes in Groff's upstairs home. One day, getting tired of pushing the baby coach back and forth, he tied a rope on one end, pushed and then pulled on the rope. Coming upstairs one day Mother almost went into hysterics to see the coach and baby roll along to the top of the stairway. Did Hen ever get a bawling out!

After Ross Eyler¹⁹ was hired he and I used to call the place "Misery Hall," affectionate-like. The business got too much for just the Boss and me even though we let the furniture repairing go. Mother was boarding a seminary student, Paul Eyler, from Maryland who talked for a job for his brother, Ross. Ross was hired, a great guy, but after about fifteen years he and his wife Bertha (she was a Rudy) went back to Thurmont, Maryland and started a nice little business collecting chickens and butter over the mountains and taking it into the Baltimore markets. Dr. Paul Eyler at the General Hospital is Ross's nephew.

Eyler and I would get in real late sometimes from night calls. Your mother and Bertha, his wife, would fuss about it and after a bit we decided to stop the complaining. We'd say, "Well, we had to visit Marybelle and Florence." That teasing really burned them up. Actually we often stopped at a "greasy sleeve" for a cup of coffee before we walked up back home. Neither Ross nor I drank.

Through the years I got real close to most of the embalmers who were hired, then left "Misery Hall" for one reason or another. Mother (Eddie) passed away in 1932 and F. F. in 1938. Bob Sr. carried on his father's work. He'd helped out as early as during his vacations from Culver Military Academy. His sister, Johanna, and her husband, Edward Foehl, now of Pennwyn, Pa. lived and worked at the place for a time. Tom McElwee, Dunn Long and Norm Reese are fixtures there now and someday "Little Bob" (he's a fine young fellow) will be important down there.

Patsy Centini and Lee Hartranft worked at chauffeuring and other jobs around "Misery Hall" for many years. Miss Adda Mowrer spent many evenings and Sundays "taking calls." Miss Lydia Baum²⁰ was the first woman hired to lay out. Mrs. Laura Caldwell succeeded her, then Mrs. Laura Gilgore.

Once on a visit to a Philadelphia undertaker the Boss was impressed with the uniformed and white-gloved colored man who opened the door at a viewing. He hired Billy Wilson for our place. Mother needed kitchen help so Billy was that and ran all our errands besides being doorman. But he didn't stay long with us. One morning Billy put the meat Mother had bought at Central Market into the ice-box but didn't close the door right. Later when she went into the kitchen the dog was enjoying it on the kitchen oil-cloth. F. F. had to do without his doorman from then on. Mother fired him.

Cooling Boards and Ice Boxes

I've made a casket or two in my time but at first mostly it was my job to trim them.²¹ We bought the linings by the bolt and I'd take a good chew of tobacco, a mouthful of tacks and start swinging that hammer. Finished up the job in jig time. Boy, have caskets changed during the years! Come lined and ready to bury. Remember now, Boyertown Casket Company still makes a good casket and I want one of theirs with a mattress in it.

The Amish use "cellar door" caskets and dressed the men without trousers. No waste. They use just a one-horse hearse.

I was just a bit too late on the job to catch the "ice box" time. When I started the County Home still had a few that they used until we got there and the hospitals too but now they have a large refrigerator.

Uncle John Bowers from New Holland, no relation, owned a furniture store and repair shop. He was a good, kind father to his adopted son, Paul Esbenshade. Paul wanted to be an undertaker so he came to us to learn and later went to school in Philadelphia for a couple months.

Now Uncle John had a lot of Amish trade and one of the few ice-boxes in the county that the Amish could use. They didn't go

in for embalming. When Paul came back from school in Philadelphia he was all steamed up about new embalming methods and he said, "Uncle John, no more preservers." (Ice-boxes)

"But, Paul," said Uncle John, "The Amish want it."

"Let them go somewhere else," said Paul.

The Amish are smart. They didn't call Paul in on their cases. They just went personally to Uncle John and asked him for the loan of his preserver. He gave it to them, of course. One day Paul took the axe and smashed that icebox to smithereens. That was the end of that.

Uncle John passed away and Paul's son-in-law had gone in with Paul. It's Esbenshade and High²² and I understand they do pretty well. Uncle John Bowers was a nice, old fellow.

Folks needed the sick bed for visiting relatives so we dressed the body and put it on cooling board until we placed it in the casket. One man would have none of that for his wife. He not only dressed her in a beautiful dress instead of a shroud but surrounded her bed with many beautiful bouquets until after the funeral. That sure caused talk.

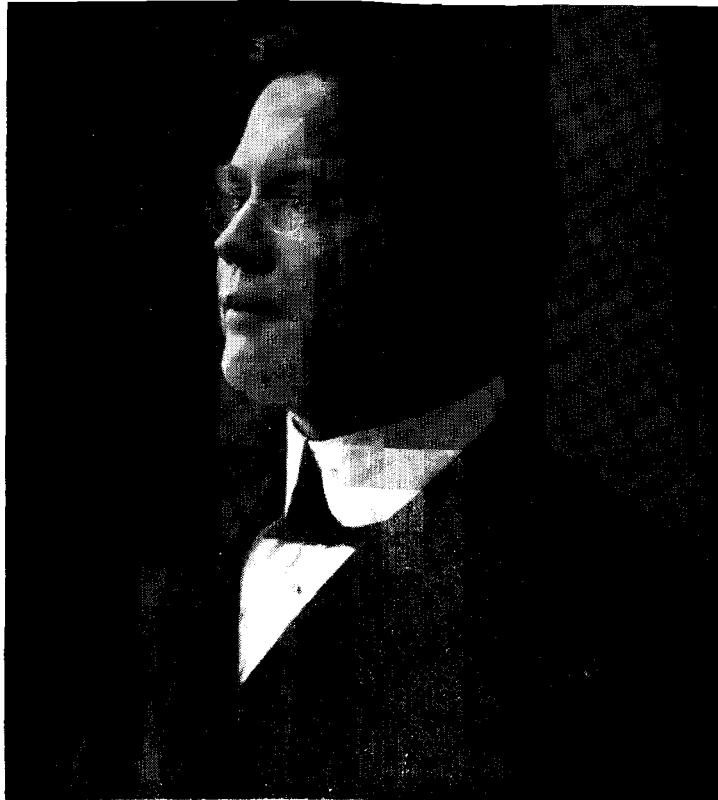
I've heard that it was common in old times to tie the body onto a cooling board and hang it in the barn until the spring ground thaw.

There was a likable half-wit (he was afraid Indians would capture him) who used to hang around "Misery Hall" quite a bit. He wanted to be helpful and begged F. F. to take him along on a call. Shorthanded one day, F. F. did. The two of them put a body on the cooling board to carry it downstairs to the parlor of the deceased. Halfway down the helper fainted and dropped his end, and started to slide down the staircase. F. F. told that he just pushed him along with a foot, slid the cooling board and body downstairs, picked up the body, threw it over his shoulder and managed alone.

In the early 1900's everyone used a shroud, never even thought of putting real clothes on a corpse. The men's shroud had a dicky and tie just like a suit but there was a skirt bottom.

The Boss owned two houses on Water Street. Between them and the garage was an incline and quite a space. He built it up and roofed it over and there's where Patsy Centini made concrete vaults when he first came to us. Patsy lived in one of the houses. No funeral director makes his own vaults now.

When I first started embalming the fluid was mostly formaldehyde. F. F. made up his own formula and had the druggist at Manor and W. King Street make it up for him. Many's the time I trudged from W. Orange Street, a big empty jug in each hand, down to the drugstore and then back with the fluid.



Fred F. Groff in early year of the business, probably around 1910.

That stuff was rough on your hands and some fellows' were a mess. They cracked and bled and got awful sore but the worst that happened to mine was that they'd dry and flake. No rubber gloves then. That early embalming fluid was so awfully strong that it couldn't help but preserve but it sure didn't do much for the looks of the corpse.

Often when we embalmed children who'd died of diphtheria we'd be asked to hold them up to the windows so their playmates could get a last look. Not allowed to have viewings. Then we'd wrap the body in a sheet soaked in formaldehyde, then in cotton, then in another sheet. If it was buried outside the city the casket had to be put in a tin box and the tinsmith had to solder all the edges. State law.

Smallpox was a terrible disease. The authorities would put up a little booth right on the sidewalk in front of the house of the vic-

tim. There was a red warning flag flown from the top and a man from the Health Department stayed there to answer questions or to take and deliver stuff from the house. The County decided to build a pest house for smallpox on the grounds of the County Home. It was a one-story building with just about four rooms in it.

We protected ourselves from diphtheria and scarlet fever and such by setting a "rough box," used in the old days instead of a vault, up on end and put fumigating candles in to purify our clothes kept at "Misery Hall" for just such cases. I lived in fear that you and your brother, Dick, would catch something from me. Dick did. Scarlet fever.²³ You didn't, thank God.

During the 1918 Spanish flu epidemic "Misery Hall" was swamped with bodies even though we buried quickly and privately. We ran out of caskets and used just "rough boxes." I never had enough time to eat and sleep. The Moose Hall was an emergency hospital that October and restaurants closed for a couple of months. One of the saddest times of my life was when I took the flu (luckily you two kids and your mother escaped it) and Emil Veit from Monterey worked in my place. Emil had just started in business, a fine young man with wonderful wife and four children. He caught the flu too and died. I guess I'll never get over that.

"Darn That Telephone"

Sometimes we worked mighty long hours even though there wasn't an epidemic. Doctors and undertakers worked all day and many a night too. When folks wanted you they wanted you. I'd crawl into bed after a night call and often that darn telephone would get me out again. F. F. paid for a telephone for our house long before our neighbors had one. Later on there were two teams of us and we alternated weeks answering night calls.

At first if I went to church or out visiting I always told F. F. where I was going and he'd come after me if we had a call. We were active in the Olivet Baptist Church on E. Chestnut Street. One time I was in charge of a church social excursion on the Lady Gay, a pleasure boat, down the Conestoga Creek to Peoples' Park. Cap Peoples had sold Rocky Springs Park to a man named Griffiths and then set up a rival park on the other side of the creek. Instead of a hurdy-gurdy that trip we hired a mandolin club and we had plenty of ice cream and layer cake and pretzels.

After you and your brother Dick joined Emmanuel Lutheran (you'd started there to Sunday School when we moved on W. Walnut Street) your mother and I joined too and decided not to be so strict about cards and dancing. We played a little five hundred with our friends and when Lizzie Eshleman's (our neighbor) brother-in-law, Wesley Brubaker, started a dancing class in Brinkman's Hall across the alley from First Reformed Church your mother and I joined. You and your brother got to go along and picked up the

Schottische and One Step and all the others. Your mother was a good five hundred player and dancer. I never could keep time but we had fun going to Rocky Springs dance pavilion which Wes ran in the summer. This was around 1920. Remember? You baby-sat with Jean Elizabeth and later Mary Lou unless you had a date.

I'd dropped the Royal Arcanum Lodge and joined the Maltas but couldn't get to the meetings so dropped that too. I got to some of the meetings of the Lancaster County Funeral Directors Association. Your mother looked forward to their Ladies' Night. She enjoyed the Lions' Club Ladies Night too, and she used to belong to a neighborhood weekly sewing circle as well as the Ladies' Aid and Missionary Society at Emmanuel. She helped in the Sunday School too when your sisters were little.

I was a charter member of the Lions' Club but I think F. F. never quite approved of a long lunch hour so eventually I resigned. We had a fine program at a regular session at the Brunswick one noon. Members were to have the opportunity to hear the new miracle of the age—the radio. Arrangements were made with Washington, D. C. to hear a political speech and the hotel had installed special equipment. The coming event was the talk of Lancaster and members asked if they could bring their friends so the ballroom was packed.

Without too much fuss Washington was tuned in and the speech was clear as a bell, really a miracle and a great thrill for all of us. Then suddenly the curtains on the stage parted and there was a phonograph! We'd been taken! A record had been made of a speech given the day before.

A Funny Thing Happened

Funeral sermons were long in the early 1900's and often the Boss and I would go down in the church basement to escape them. The country women would be preparing food for after the burial and they gave us a fine social time and fed us well. I bet I've eaten more funeral pie (raisin) than anyone else in the County.

One day F. F. knew he would be meeting many old friends among the church women and he took along a mechanical mouse and put it beside his plate when he was about to be served. The screech of the waitress stopped the sermon upstairs and brought a deacon down. Fred sure was in a tough spot there.

The colored Methodist Church was divided into three parts with two center aisles. During a funeral I was sitting halfway back when a hound dog ran in one door, down an aisle, then walked across the front right by the casket and started down the other aisle. But there were lots of interesting smells along the way and he decided not to be in a hurry.

Albert Wilson was an important man in that congregation. His son is now, and runs a Greist Building elevator. Well, Wilson got up and coaxed, "Here doggy! doggy! doggy!" It didn't seem to step up things any. As the hound came towards my pew I gave my shoe a scrape—"Zi-i-i-sh!" Half the congregation jumped but you shoulda seen that dog go! He was outside in no time flat.

Edie often filled a whiskey bottle with hot coffee for F. F. on the long, cold, country rides to the cemetery. One day he put the bottle at his feet beside me as I drove the hearse. Going up a steep hill the bottle rolled out. We tried to catch it but it bumped the whole way down the hill past the mourners' carriages. In spite of the Boss's explanation he felt he was never quite believed.

We got a call from Holtwood where the dam and railroad were being built. F. F. made Ross Eyler carry a revolver in case he'd meet some of the rough, laboring characters down there. Ross drove to Pequea and then hiked down the railroad tracks to Holtwood to embalm the body. Dark overtook him on the way back. He heard footsteps stalking him but he couldn't see a thing. He hustled into the Pequea Inn and the proprietor, noticing that he was white and shaking, asked what happened. Just then two men came in laughing. They'd been behind Ross the whole way and had purposely kept hidden for a joke. Ross took a lot of kidding for that.

One snowy day there was a call to Salunga. The Boss said he didn't think the horses could make it so Ross and I took the trolley car. After we fixed up the body we found the trolleys couldn't run anymore so we hiked to the railroad station and the station master put up the flag to stop the Columbia-Lancaster train.

The engineer said we were crazy to board it for he didn't know if he could make it to Lancaster. We got on anyhow and went along until Dillerville where we got stuck in the train all night. There were a lot of people stuck with us. The Pennsy (Pennsylvania Railroad Company) had run a special car from York to Lancaster to see the opera "Parsival"²⁴ at the Fulton Opera House and they never did make it. Next morning another engine came out and hauled us into the station at Chestnut and N. Queen Streets.

There was the time Ross and I were fixing the body of a colored man who lived in an alley back of Grace Lutheran Church. A hurdy-gurdy man came playing along the street and startled the horses that pulled the dead wagon waiting out in front. Ross dashed out, settled the horses and returned. He took off his suit coat to get to work again. Was he disgusted! He'd hurriedly put on the dead man's coat to go out instead of his own.

One winter night we had a call, a little colored baby, at a shack in Feagleyville, a N. Prince Street Negro settlement. Ross got frightened there. They had a little stove which was heated with soft coal they picked up from along the railroad track and it got hot

as blazes. An old Mammy mourner began to shout and sway. Ross got panicky and ran out of the shack yelling to me, "Get me out of here! Get me out of here!" I thought I'd split laughing.

Two Double Hangings

F. F. was in politics and the County favored him a bit, I guess, for he usually got the bodies that were hanged. I think he was on City Council at one time but one day he said to me, "Abner, politics and this business just don't mix." So he got out.

We had two double hangings. In June, 1905, Lee Furman and John O'Brein paid for killing old Sam Ressler, a toll-keeper on the Philadelphia Pike. We waited for the bodies in the jailyard and saw two juries of twelve men each walk out first from the jail over to the scaffold. Then the Deputies walked up onto the platform. Sheriff Kready and ex-Sheriff Myers²⁵ led the death march out of the little green door in the jail followed by the criminals and Father Kaul²⁶ and his assistant priest. The killers were to be buried in unblessed ground at St. Anthony's cemetery. Practically all hangings except the Aston boys were buried there.

We weren't in on the quadruple hanging two years later of those Italian railroad workers. Only fifty people saw that. We did have the Aston boys, Walter and Ben, who murdered the hotel man, Alfred Hallman.

The authorities had those boys dressed nice, shaved and bathed, in dark blue suits. They sure looked fine. It made you wonder what it was all about—just two good-looking kids!

They'd come from down around Rawlinsville and were drinking at the hotel there. Not unusual for boys around twenty years old but the drink got to them and they began talking about the money they thought Hallman had and they killed him to get it.

I can see in my mind's eye that beautiful June day and that gallows. It was rented from Berks County. That was smart, less expense for the County. I can still see our hearse and two baskets waiting for the boys. Brother! Was that crowd in the jailyard drinking whiskey! Everybody!

It wasn't a public hanging but everybody that knew the sheriff wanted a permit and got it so we had a pretty good crowd. There were no women in the courtyard but the windows of the jail were packed with them watching.

Sheriff Zielger was a big man but it was no fun for him to pull that trap for two. And he couldn't get out of it. When the ropes were tied on the boys' necks the knots were put back of the ears.

When the lever opened the trapdoor in the floor of the platform it sounded like I don't know what. They just let the bodies swing there a while before they cut them down. They left the noose and

black caps on and after the Doctor O. K.'d things we walked over with our baskets and put them in that way. We kept those nooses and caps around "Misery Hall" for a long time but I don't know where they got to.

When we drove out into E. King Street it was filled with people. The trees and telephone poles were loaded with kids trying to look over the jail walls into the yard.

I guess everyone was glad when, in 1912, the State said, "No more executions by the counties," and used the electric chair up at Bellefonte. I know I was. I didn't enjoy those hangings.

Policemen and Preachers

I got to know some of our preachers and the boys at the police station pretty well. We used to call for off-duty policemen to be pallbearers and in later years to run interference with their cycles from our funeral parlor through the city to the cemetery. Afterwards they'd walk up to "Misery Hall" for their tips and we'd chew the fat. A good bunch of guys mostly.

I remember Fatty Gill well. In the early 1900's he controlled the votes on Cabbage Hill and had himself appointed as a cop to drive the new patrol wagon. It was open with brass rails at the steps and as the little bay pony pulled it along it seemed as if overweight Fatty would topple it. The first time he drove it down N. Queen Street a bum loafing there yelled, "Fatty, you'd better put the pony in that wagon and do the pulling yourself." Others took up the teasing whenever he went out and at his first official call, by gum, he drove so fast around a corner that the wagon really did upset.

One day a family in the west End called Gill to go fetch their daughter who was running away with a beau they didn't like. He caught up with them in their buggy on the Marietta Pike and I saw the three of them riding in the patrol wagon back up to the girl's house on N. Mary Street. Fatty just opened the door of the house, pushed the couple inside and rode off. The neighbors who had gathered 'round sure were disappointed there wasn't more of a ruckus.

I was busy trimming a casket one day, around 1910 I guess, when a fellow came running into the place and yelled, "Ab, you ought to go up town and see the craziest thing! They've got a cop in the middle of the diamond on Orange and Queen Streets telling the horses which way to go!" I ran right up and sure enough the fellow was right. A big crowd was on the four corners there watching and razzing that poor policeman.

Not long after that they got another cop to stand at Penn Square and direct teamsters on W. King Street how to drive around the monument and up N. Queen Street. One icy day a big wagon and team from the Caramel Factory came along and the cop waved

him around to one side. The teamster knew his horses couldn't make it that way and he balked. That policeman got pretty mad. So did the driver. "Damn you," he yelled and got down off his seat, "then you drive them horses around." He got his way.

You got to know some of the preachers pretty well sitting with them up there in a hearse on the way to the cemetery. And we didn't talk about the dearly beloved either. Jimmy Wagner²⁷ was



Abner M. Eyde, age 18. Picture taken in 1891 one year before being permanently hired by F. F. Groff.

one of my favorites. He and I had some fine bull sessions over a cup of coffee with the Conestoga Traction men at the "dirty sleeve" in the Central Market.

One preacher who headed a big downtown church was so dignified and proper to everyone that it hurt. One day, however, after a farm funeral, he crawled up beside me on the hearst laughing fit to bust. Then he said, "Mr. Eyde, I've just had a very startling encounter." I wondered what was coming. "The little daughter of this household chose to join me on an errand of outdoor necessity." From then on we were real friendly.

The Rev. Meister²⁸ of St. Stephen's Lutheran was well loved but strict as all get out. He was known for his heavy German ac-

cent and his way of saving a penny. A friend and he were walking along the street and the preacher bid the time of day to a passerby who gave him a very cold nod in return.

"See that fellow?" asked the Reverend.

"Yes, what's the matter with him?"

"Vell, I'll tell you," went on Rev. Meister. "He come to me to get married but he didn't have any money so I said, "'That's all right, I'll chust marry you anyhow,' and I did. Then I heard all around how he was making the boasts as how he got a free marry from that dumb Rev. Meister so—," and he chuckled, "I sent him a pill."

Danny Glass²⁹ was a great one. Everyone called him "Danny" and he stayed for forty years at the Faith Reformed Church that he's started in the [7th] Ward in 1937. Very popular fellow.

Dr. Haupt³⁰ of Grace Lutheran would give you the shirt off his back. Honest! He was just like a missionary to the colored slum in Feagleyville. Once after a snowstorm someone saw him tramping home in his stocking feet from one of those shacks. He'd left his shoes for the man of the house who hadn't any so's to go to his job.

They tell, too, how Dr. Haupt wouldn't have anything to do with an evangelist who was working the city and signing up churches for his tabernacle meetings. The evangelist made fun of the good Dr. from the platform, how he'd bow and smile to "every post and pole along the street." Of course everyone in the congregation caught on even though no name was mentioned and Dr. Haupt heard about it. Next day he had a beautiful bouquet of flowers sent up to the visiting preacher in his pulpit. The card with it said, "With love from Dr. Haupt." Was that evangelist's face red! He apologized right then and there in front of the congregation but in a sneaky, clever way.

People used to say to me, "Mr. Eyde, why should a person like you take up this business? You're such a cut-up and a happy, cheerful guy." I guess I just like being with people. You met all kinds but when they had to call you they were all alike. They needed someone to help them. Once I almost changed bosses and went into business on my own. Harry Brunner from Mt. Joy was getting up there and needed someone who would eventually take over. His financial proposition would have made it real easy but I just couldn't bring myself to leave F. F. I never wanted to be anything else but a funeral director from the day I went full time with him and I just couldn't work for anyone else.

Note

Fred F. Groff, Inc. celebrated Abner McMichael Eyde's fiftieth anniversary with the firm in 1950. Family, friends and staff members banqueted at the Stevens House. Speeches were made and Ab-

ner received a greeting card with many signatures and a TV set. However, he had no intention of retiring at sixty-nine and continued to go down every day to "Misery Hall," working as much and as long as he wished. Viewings were his favorite assignment for there he met old friends. Though unable to work after April, 1955, he continued to be on the payroll for almost another year and conceded to retirement at seventy-five. In 1963, after a long illness, he at last rested in the casket with the mattress.

That same year Dad made the Trade Winds column of the April 20th issue of "The Saturday Review." It noted, "Barbara Bromer tells us that her mother (Marion, daughter of Dr. Walter D. Blankenship) knew an undertaker named Abner Eyde, who claimed he got a free plug at funerals. More often than not 'Ab Eyde with Me' was sung."

As a very little child I was proud that the congregation sang about my father. Older, I thought it just great for I was included. Weren't my initials "M. E."? So it is fitting that "A Lancaster City Boy in the Gay Nineties" has been told by Ab Eyde with me.

REFERENCES, NOTES, COMMENTS

- 1 John C. Fogle began manufacturing furniture in Christiana in 1866. In 1870 Joseph H. Fogle, father of Edith, started a planing mill and took over his father's furniture plant seven years later. The Christiana Planing Mill was established by Fogle in 1879, taken over by Harry Davis in 1883 as the Davis Lumber and Planing Mill. The Milton Young Company of Philadelphia owned it in 1922. (H. M. J. Klein, Ed., Lancaster County, Pennsylvania V. I, p. 49.)
- 2 William F. Beyer was admitted to practice in the courts of Lancaster County in 1876. (Klein, Lancaster County, Pa., V. II, p. 899.)
- 3 Amos C. Rote and his son, Henry C. operated the undertaking parlors of Amos C. Rote and Son at 155 S. Queen Sts. (R. L. Polk and Company—Directory of Lancaster, Pa. and Vicinity 1899-90.)
- 4 John Jones Watson went into cabinet making and undertaking at Conestoga Center for three years then at Coatesville and in 1877 moved to West Chester. In 1884 he set up business on E. Orange St., Lancaster, eventually moving to S. Queen St., first on the site of the subsequent Inquirer Printing Company and finally at 114 S. Queen St. (J. H. Beers, Pub., Biographical Annals of Lancaster County, Pa.)
- 5 Daddy Shaub was probably John H. Shaub of 412 W. King St., whose address is that on F. F. Groff's 1899 license as a funeral director. John Fackenthal, druggist and perhaps Mr. Shaub's employer, is listed in early Lancaster city directories at 402 W. King St.
- 6 Miss Mabel L. Keemer of 1861 Lincoln Highway East remembers "Mr. Eyde" handling her mother's funeral and talking to her at that time about the old boarding house days. Her father, James Garfield Keemer, started his little cleaning business in 1927 at the above address. The whole family assisted in the work which was done in the garage. An addition was built but in 1941 a larger building was opened at the 1951 address. Eventually the business was sold to Yorgey's Fine Cleaners.
- 7 Folks often came to our front door to ask Dad to lend them his high silk hat and frock coat for a play or pageant. He was always willing but later kept an old set on hand just for lending as they did with the folding chairs. I was on many "social committees" for Dad would please me by not only providing the chairs but deliver, set them up and collect them all for free

- 8 The Lancaster City Directory, 1909-1910 ran an advertisement stating Powl was "successor to Chas. H. Smith." Eli B. Powl took over his father's (Eli) livery stables at 14 E. Walnut St. in 1884. The 60 x 96 foot stable was three stories high, had an electric elevator and could supply at least thirty rigs, fifteen hacks and three hearses. (Beers—Biographical Annals, p. 480.)
- 9 Charles H. Smith was successor to G. Harry Reed's old Lakeland Stables at 153 N. Queen St. He was said to have the largest livery business in Lancaster around 1903. His specialities included funeral and wedding rigs, equipage for pleasure parties, busses and commercial wagons. Forty horses were kept ready. (Beers—Biographical Annals. p. 480.)
- 10 Mabel Musser Wiker of 129½ E. King St., widow of George Wiker, recalls the frightening "clop clop" sound of the hooves of the horses which pulled that dead wagon. It was about 1902 when she and her brother Bill, now deceased, picked up their sleds and ran scared home to 415 N. Pine St.
- 11 Jacob L. Grimm was a coachman who resided at 429 Cherry St., according to the 1898 Lancaster City Directory. Two succeeding directories changed his name from Grimm to Grim and listed "sales and coach stables" at 214 W. Orange St., then "garage" at 108 N. Water St.
- 12 B. Franklin Futer started business at 28-30 E. Chestnut St. and is listed in the 1919-1920 Lancaster City Directory at 218-220 W. Orange St. He moved to 500 W. Orange Street in the early 1920's. A former alderman and pioneer automobile distributor, he died at the age of sixty-four in 1912. (Intelligencer Journal, Lancaster, Pa. n.d.)
- 13 At the age of twenty Clayton G. Landis entered the real estate and insurance business. In later years he was president of the Lancaster Real Estate Company. He dealt extensively in thoroughbred horses both in Lancaster and as the Union Coach Horse Company in New York City. (Beers—Biographical Annals, p. 1358.)
- 14 Henry Weill, a native of France, came to Lancaster with his brother Benjamin in 1881 and started a dealership in driving, heavy draft and fine coach and saddle horses with sale and exchange stables. He fully owned the business in 1891 at 200-216 W. Orange St. He exported as many as two thousand horses a year to London in addition to running a leaf tobacco business. (Beers—Biographical Annals, p. 804.)
- 15 Dr. David H. Shenk practised at 226 N. Duke St. and resided at 228. His last entry in the Lancaster City Directory was in 1898.
- 16 Mrs. Laura Caldwell, widow of Raymond Caldwell of Millersville, boarded at 653 S. Queen St. (Lancaster City Directory—1919-1920.)
- 17 Daniel Webster Sheaffer learned butchering from his father, Daniel, of Millersville. At twenty he was a teamster at Swift and Company's Lancaster headquarters. At twenty-four he opened his shop at 416-418 N. Pine St. and held the record for killing nearly all the prized steers coming to the city. He was president of the New Ideal Power Company of York, Democratic candidate for mayor of Lancaster in 1919 and Marshall of many parades. (Klein—Lancaster County, Pa. V. III, p. 179.)
- 18 I remember the day Dad first drove the Maxwell home. I was so excited to see that huge, noisy "machine." Residents of the five hundred block of Spruce St. crowded around. Mother woke me from a nap, quickly dressed my brother Dick and me and after Dad had the engine cranked and going we chugged off for our first automobile ride. Dad was so proud!
- 19 Ross Eyler is first listed in a Lancaster City Directory in 1905, married and living at the funeral parlor, 234 W. Orange St.

Dr. Paul Eyler says that his father, the Rev. Albert Eyler had a Reformed Church parish in Bedford, Pa. He and F. F. Groff were great fishing pals for many years.

- 20 Miss Baum died in 1965, aged ninety-one. (Intelligencer Journal, n. d.)
- 21 Abner, after many years of experience, attended Eckel's Embalming College, Philadelphia. He got his diploma after attending just a few weeks of the three months course, spending most of that time demonstrating his methods. It was many years before the state required an embalmer to get a license though the owner, or director, had to some time before.

- 22 The George D. High Funeral Home is located at 145 E. Main St., New Holland, Pa.
- 23 Fumigating candles burned constantly at our house while Dick was ill. Mother kept a formaldehyde saturated sheet over his closed bedroom door and would put on a special night dress and dust cap treated the same way when she went into his room.
- 24 Mrs. J. Nevin Schaeffer recalled that, as a member of Miss Stahr's School in the early 1900's, she attended "Parsival" sitting in peanut heaven. The girls trudged through the blizzard carrying box lunches as the performance started at 3:00 p.m. and lasted for many hours. The audience was slim. (H. M. J. Klein—typed manuscript "Fulton Opera House.")
- 25 Bernard Joy Myers was sheriff of Lancaster Co. from 1896-1900. Training under W. U. Hensel, he was admitted to the bar in 1903 to become a very successful lawyer, city solicitor 1910-1919 and Attorney General of the State of Pennsylvania in 1919 as well as Secretary of the Commonwealth in 1921. (Klein—Lancaster County, Pa. V. III p. 70.)
- 26 In 1919 the Right Rev. Monsignor Anthony F. Kaul celebrated his golden jubilee as founder and rector of St. Anthony's Roman Catholic Church. Citizens of Lancaster, regardless of creed, did homage to him and the church named in his honor. (Klein—Lancaster County, Pa. V. III p. 213.)
Edgar Musser states that Father Kaul (1846-1935) served St. Anthony's from 1869 to 1934, Emeritus the last year he lived. This is probably the longest pastorate in the Roman Catholic Church in the United States.
- 27 Dr. James E. Wagner served St. Peter's Evangelical and Reformed Church parish from 1931 to 1953 when he moved to Philadelphia as President of the Evangelical and Reformed Church. From 1957-1961 he also served as co-President of the United Church of Christ then in process of formation. He was Vice-President of Ursinus College until 1968 when he retired to Norristown, Pa. He authored three books. (Intelligencer Journal Jan. 4, 1968.)
- 28 The Rev. Emil Meister (1850-1915), a native of Germany, was editor of **The Kutztown Journal** and publisher of the **Baltimore Daily Wecker**, before taking up the ministry. He was pastor of St. Stephen's Evangelical Lutheran Church from 1880 to 1915. A member of Lancaster City School Board and well known lecturer, his most popular orations being "Ben Hur" and "The Great National Tragedy and Death of President William McKinley. (Beers—Biographical Annals p. 477.)
- 29 The Rev. Daniel Glass, according to the Rev. David L. Gockley of Faith United Church of Christ, supplied the Faith Reformed Church, his only pastorate, from 1897 to retirement in 1938. In 1897 there were only six members but he "received into the fellowship" over fifteen hundred, preached five thousand, seven hundred and thirty-five sermons, baptized two thousand, five hundred and fifty-eight, confirmed one thousand, three hundred and sixty-one and conducted one thousand, six hundred and five funerals, as well as two thousand, one hundred and forty-one weddings.
- 30 The Rev. Charles Elvin Haupt D.D. (1852-1920), pastor of Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church died in service. He was closely identified in establishing Emmanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church, Madame Cotta College for Young Women and Lancaster General Hospital. He taught "Mental and Moral Philosophy" at Franklin and Marshall College and chemistry at the hospital nursing school. His writings include a textbook on chemistry, the life of Dr. Emmanuel Greenwald and Biblical history stories. (Klein—Lancaster County, Pa. V. I, p. 48.)