

Interesting Lancaster Folks,

Odd and Otherwise.

by Abner McMichael Eyde
as told to Miriam Eyde Bixler

You know there were some real interesting and then again some mighty odd folks around Lancaster in my day. If I put my mind to it maybe I could recollect a few for you.

Let's see. For one there was "Toodler Richardson". He thought for sure that he was a ventriloquist but he wasn't. He'd try to make animal and bird sounds. That sort of thing. The young boys about town began to taunt him with "Quack, quack!" whenever they saw him so his name became "Toodler Quack, Quack". He fixed window-panes. He carried three carpet bags for his tools and stuff. He wasn't very clean.

Note: This could well be the same "Toodler" who Riddle called an artist at decorating the "ginger horses" so popular as a confection with Lancaster children. (William Riddle, *The Story of Lancaster, Old and New*, p. 237). Only the 1903 edition of the *Lancaster City Directory* notes a Charles Richardson, baker, 623 S. Queen Street. No bakeshop is recorded.

"Doc" Welchans got his nickname because his father was an M. D. "Doc" and his mother, a nice woman, lived on N. Mulberry Street. He wound wall clocks and tore off yesterday's date from calendars for the downtown business men. Charge—ten cents a day. He had a thing that he couldn't let anyone get ahead of him on the sidewalk so he'd be half running all the time to get up front.

Note: Pranksters tried to confuse "Doc" by pasting back the discarded calendar page of the day before. Once, sitting on a crate by a doorway, a boy called out an insulting remark to "Doc" then quickly slid from his perch on the box. Another boy quickly took the seat and was surprised when, on turning, "Doc" clouted him so hard that he was pushed into the street gutter.

Walter L. Reisner, a native moved to Wynnewood, told in 1958 that Welchans was a "dependable but mildly odd person who was blessed with a good nature, a modest man who willingly, capably and devotedly performed his humble responsibility". ("Town Characters," *Sunday News*, October 19, 1958.)

"Doc's" father, Dr. George R. Welchans, had been a druggist who studied under Dr. John L. Atlee and received his M. D. from the Jefferson Medical College in 1867. He was physician to the County Hospital for sometime and a member of the United States Pension Board of Examining Surgeons. (Franklin Ellis and Samuel Evans, Eds., *History of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania*, p. 288).

"Squire" Frank McGrann is a personality, a good, kind man. Always was. He owned the land on the east side of New Holland Pike from Franklin Street to the Lancaster Country Club. His brother, Richard, owned the side where the Grandview Heights development was built.

Frank loved to blow the horn and he brought some mighty good band music to Lancaster, including John Phillip Sousa. When Sousa came to town Frank always led his band in a number or two. I even think he wrote some music. The "Squire" was a close, personal friend of many other famous men like Henry Fillmore, Frank Simon, Herbert Clarke and Edmund Franko Goldman.

He loved to run the trolleys too. He'd board the New Holland in front of his place and run it up to the square. Folks said he was allowed because "he owned a piece of the trolley company." He didn't.

Note: Frank McGrann (1880-1962), according to H. M. J. Klein's *Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, a History*, v. IV, p. 399, was known as a poultry fancier, farmed four hundred acres and was, in addition, a businessman and Justice of the Peace of Manheim Township. He was responsible for establishing Troop E of the Pennsylvania State Police, which headquartered, in 1919, on his old homestead farm now the site of the Grandview Apartments, New Holland and McGrann Avenues. He organized the Elk's orchestra. Knowledgeable sources add that he was a special agent of the SPCA, a director of the Conestoga National Bank for over fifty years and was one of the founders of the Eden Fire Company.

"Captain" Peoples, a huge, broad-shouldered fellow, told a story on himself. One day he needed a shoeshine and when a Negro shoeshine boy came up the first block of N. Queen Street he stuck out his foot. The boy ran at the mouth as he polished and then began asking questions but "Cappy" stayed mum not wanting to get into a conversation. A second shoeshine boy came up to watch and began chattering at Peoples. The first said, "Don't bother talking. He can't

hear a word you say." The second boy looked "Cappy" over, then exclaimed, "Big son of a b....., ain't he?". Peoples thought this was a good one on him.

Note: John Peoples owned the "Lady Gay", the pleasure "yacht" which sailed the Conestoga. He was the proprietor of Peoples' Bathing Resort, manager of the Woolworth Roof Garden and "connected" with the Northwestern Insurance Co. His family owned the nationally famous fish hatcheries at New Providence. (J. H. Beers and Co., *Biographical Annals of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania*, p. 756.)

Around 1900 you could see Jaky Parks pushing his queer-looking wheelbarrow around town to collect newspapers. That wheelbarrow hadn't any sides or legs. Jaky was a club-footed Negro with a white goatee and everybody knew him.

Note: Jaky collected paper and rags from the streets and sidewalks. The late G. Howard Risser of Meiskey's, Inc. recalled that if Jaky were asked how business was he would answer, "Picking up". When Jaky died around 1928 at ninety-two years he'd been living in a loft above the machine shop of James H. Wild Co. on N. Queen Street. He'd moved there from a log cabin at the corner of S. Queen and Farnum Streets. When young he worked as a lawn-raker, cellar white-washer and public porter. It was said that in his early years no one could "beat" a banjo as well. His playing was good for many a free meal at the local bars.

No one was sure Jaky could read but he seriously studied the *Literary Digest*. He hoarded shoes, leaving fifty-two pairs at his death. His huge appetite made him unwelcome at the free lunch counters so restaurants handed him his food on platters. He always said his age was sixty-eight. He claimed to make his own cold remedy of coffee grounds, machine oil, toilet soap, lemon soda-pop and mackerel brine. ("Town Characters," *Sunday News*, October 19, 1958.)

The Boy Scouts and the men's hunting clubs around here hired a wonderful cook named Daniel Hartman. He was a quick, energetic, little fellow. When the Scouts started their first camp at Lake Grubb around 1920 they got Danny right off to cook for them! Boy! did those kids sail into his food! He was a pretty old man when he was still cooking and selling stuff from his home. Around Thanksgiving time our front door-bell would ring and there was Danny with a basket of bottled rose water that he'd mixed up in his kitchen. Your mother just couldn't've [sic] made her Christmas peppernut cakes without Danny's rosewater.

They said he put oil of roses in wash boilers and big cook pots of water and let it set without cooking for so many days. Then he



Jaky Parks

filled glass jars to sell. At one time he made medicine candy, like horehound drops, cold drops and rock candy.

As a young man Mr. Hartman worked in a tobacco warehouse until he developed respiratory trouble. Later he opened a confectionary store at 832 N. Queen Street (now D. M. Weaver Sons, Meats) and made his own ice cream. He ran a grocery store and lived above it first on the southeast corner of Frederick and N. Queen Streets and then on the northwest corner. His specialties were sauerkraut, spearmint sticks and fasnachts.

Mrs. Alma Eshleman Brubaker, his granddaughter, recalls that in his later years when he lived with her parents there were custo-

mers who would drive from Philadelphia for his sauerkraut. Some tried to buy just the juice but Danny said he wouldn't know what to do with the kraut that was left. At this time, too, he continued to provide washbasketsful of fasnachts to local churches for their Fasnacht festivals. Mrs. Brubaker still owns the big, iron hook Danny used to pull his spearmint taffy. She recalls how he liked to tell of the time he cooked for a railroad painting crew at Safe Harbor. He bunked in one car with the workers and cooked in another. (Interview with Mrs. Carl H. Brubaker, 535 State Street. March 16, 1974.)

Willie Echternacht was an earlier candymaker. He wore a chef's uniform with a tall, white hat and hawked a tray of chewing candy up and down N. Queen Street. It was mostly vanilla and chocolate flavored. That was before Hen McMichael's time.

Note: At "Zahm's Corner" on the square (site of the Fulton Bank) a gentleman dressed in starched white carried a tray from which he sold strawberry, chocolate and vanilla, bite-sized, chewing candy for ten cents a bag. (Advertisement of Rebman's Holiday Store. *Sunday News*, November 4, 1973.)

"Blind Johnny" Shindle sat against a telephone pole in Penn Square and played the accordian. His favorite spot was in front of Hirsh and Bros. clothing store. A tin cup was on the pavement beside him.

Note: At the first sign of spring "Blind Johnny" would appear at his post on the square. He would accompany his playing with periodic squirts of a stream of chewing tobacco juice. He stayed there until cold weather. "Social workers ruled he shouldn't play his tunes there any longer and that was the end of Johnny's zest for life!" ("Town Characters," *Sunday News*, October 19, 1958.)

Later Hen McMichael sold the same type of candy and dressed the same except that he wore a tall white hat instead of a white cap with a visor. Folks called his taffy "Mammy Bender candy". Mammy Bender had been just about the most famous taffy maker around here. Fred Groff (the undertaker) had hired Hen in the late 1890's to help around his first place in Quarryville. The Groffs lived on the second floor. Hen was tending the baby one day when Mrs. Groff, coming home, had the daylightscared out of her. It looked like the babycoach was wheeling by itself along the upper hall towards the edge of the stairway. She rushed to find Hen seated in the hall with a rope on the carriage, giving it a push and then hauling it back. Hen told me about it years later and he said Mrs. Groff really let loose at him.

Note: It was said that the man, dressed in white, even to gloves,



"Blind Johnny" Shindle

who sold candy in front of the Colonial Theater was called "the marshmallow man" and that his specialty was chewing candy with a marshmallow base. Mammy Bender's recipe did not have a marshmallow base. I remember it well. The name was appropriate, however, for Hen was white all over like a marshmallow.

Freddy Jackson was the weak-minded son of a fine Methodist family who lived on W. Chestnut Street. Freddy hung around the place (F. F. Groff funeral home) and wanted work to do. The boss liked Freddy, so one day, shorthanded, took him to a house to help carry a body. Freddy fainted.

He was so afraid of Indians that he wouldn't come out of the house when the circus came to town. If Freddy hung around his cousin's (Bert Bostock's) confectionery and tobacco shop too long Bert would stick a feather duster at the back of his own neck and down the coat collar and whoop like an Indian. That got Freddy going!

There was a fellow, name of Charlie Haines, who lived in the south end. Charlie loafed on S. Queen Street near the Woodward Hill and Greenwood cemeteries. When he saw a funeral procession coming he'd run to meet us and marched along to whichever cemetery we were going until we reached the gate. Then he'd disappear.

"Patent Leather Clarence" (Clarence Dundore) was a harmless, simple-minded fellow whose parents kept him well-dressed and very immaculate. He roamed around downtown spotting patent leather shoes on the passersby. "Pretty shoes", he'd say as he lifted up the ladies' long skirts to look. He frightened them to death.

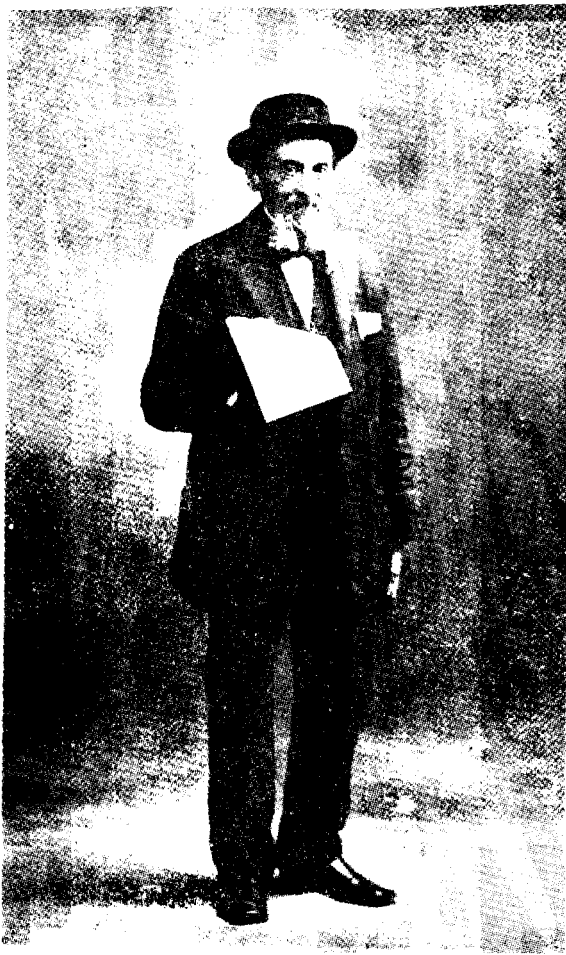
Note: I remember Mr. Dundore and, though as a child I don't think I was ever stopped by him, I always crossed the street when he approached. [MEB]

Old man Hirsh, the owner of the Penn Square clothing store had some accent! He'd display suits and other goods on the sidewalk outside his store where the Griest building is now. Fellows on their way home from work would torment him by spitting tobacco juice on the goods. He learned to keep a look-out and would shout to his help, "Oh poys! Pring the tummies in. There come the six o'clock loafers!"

Note: The *Directory of Lancaster City 1873-74* lists Hirsh and Bros. owners of a clothing and jewelry store on Penn Square:— Abraham residing at 129 N. Duke Street, Herman at 21 N. Lime Street and Gabriel of Philadelphia.

Hiram Kroom was another fellow with a big voice. He was a Scotchman [Scotsman] who sang in St. James' Episcopal Church choir. He earned his living as a scissors grinder and he used to tell folks, "I was cut out for a gentleman but the devil stole the pattern."

Note: Hiram Kroom, the scissors grinder, was reputed to possess the best voice in Lancaster. ("Town Characters," *Sunday News*, October 19, 1958.)



Baker Young

Baker Young was a little, frail guy who stood about where Woolworth's are now on N. Queen Street and sold Baer's almanacs. He had a pretty good voice for his size.

Note: Young habitually approached an unsuspecting pedestrian from the rear and roared "Almanacs!" into his ear. The startled customer often bought, relieved that he was not about to be assaulted. (Town Characters," *Sunday News*, October 19, 1958.)

Could this be the same almanac vendor whose stock in trade during the summer and fall was cried, "Homony, hominy, hominy!"" (Advertisement of Rebman's Holiday Store *Sunday News*, November 4, 1973.)

Do you know how Mayor Musser got his start? He drove cattle for his father, a cattle dealer. Well, one Fourth of July Frank was driving cattle from Pott's Landing up Poor House Hill (from Bridgeport up E. King Street past Conestoga View). Now the trolley car could go down the Hill but didn't have enough power to go up so they'd strung a cable along side it for the trip back. Well, that cable broke and it sprung towards Frank driving his cattle and it wrapped around his arm and it pulled his arm right out at the socket. With what he got from the Traction Company for that he started in the cattle business.

Note: Frank Custer Musser (1873-1933) was elected Mayor of the City of Lancaster in 1921. He was a cattle dealer and a member of the firm of the Consumer's Ice Company. He was a fervent worker for St. Joseph's Hospital and the Salvation Army. (Klein, H. M. *J. Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, a History*, v. IV, p. 305.) Also, see "Urban Reform and the Musser Coalition in the City of Lancaster, 1921-1930" *Lancaster County Historical Society Journal*, Vol. 78 No. 2, Easter 1974.