

AN OLD DIARY

(INTRODUCTORY.)

The brief paper which is to follow this introduction consists of a series of extracts selected from a diary kept by Matthias Zahm, beginning in 1835, and ending in 1849. Although Mr. Zahm died thirty-two years ago, there are, no doubt, a number of persons present who remember him well, for there was no more familiar face than his seen on the streets of Lancaster during the fifty years preceding his death on August 12, 1874. A few preliminary words, however, as to his personality will not be out of order.

Matthias Zahm came of sturdy German ancestry. He was born in 1789, and lived to the patriarchal age of eighty-five years. He was one of a family of five brothers, all of whom lived here, I believe. Race suicide not yet having become a fad, he became the father of four sons and four daughters, many of whose descendants are still living in this community.

Although everybody knew "Grandpap" Zahm fifty years ago, if you go out into the city and make inquiries as to his history about the only thing you will learn is that he was court-crier for an unremembered number of years. As the writer knew him only by sight, he is unable to add any personal recollections. But during the twenty-five years that he saw him almost daily, and often listened to him, he attained some knowledge of the man.

Mr. Zahm was small of stature, upright and walked along the street slowly and deliberately. Everybody seemed to know him, and as he was fond of gossip and story-telling he made many pauses as he passed along. Every one bid him the day, if nothing more. He was a man of shrewd common sense, with strong likes and dislikes, and he was as liberal in expressing himself of his opinions of persons and things as any man in the city. He could be sharply sarcastic and was never given to thinking one thing and saying another.

He was a close observer, both of men and things, and for many years was accustomed to note in what may be termed a note-book or diary his observations on persons and the things that were going on in the busy world around him. Some of the most piquant of his notes can not be reproduced here because they might offend the relatives of those concerning whom they were made.

But, for all that, he was a most genial man and a hearty friend. He was liberal of his means and of his advice, and the former was often more acceptable than the latter, but, as he was good natured at heart, everybody was his friend.

For more than forty years he was the crier in the Lancaster Courts. Prior to becoming such he had been a tipstaff, and, in consequence, he had been an officer of the Court for a full half century. He was rarely sick, and never absent from his post of duty during his entire official life, save during the last two terms of Court prior to his death, when his health began to fail.

He was stricken with paralysis on

Monday, August 10, and died the following Wednesday, August 12, 1874. He resided at No. 227 East Orange street, and was buried from that place on Saturday, August 15, in the Lancaster Cemetery. He would have completed his eighty-fifth year had he lived until the following Monday.

F. R. D.

1836.

January 14—About 6 a. m. Charles Nauman's livery stable was set on fire and it was destroyed. The house in which Charles Nauman and Arthur Armstrong lived was destroyed also. The property belonged to Mr. Armstrong. This was the third fire within three weeks—none accidental.

January 23—6:30 a. m.—The citizens were again called to action by the cry of fire. The stable of Mrs. Hall, property of James Evans, was set on fire. The fourth fire since December 28th.

February 7—Judge Franklin died this morning about 2 o'clock.

February 26—The silent watch began duty to-night.

April 22—About 11:20 p. m. we had the most splendid northern lights imaginable. It burst forth from the north like a cloud of fire and smoke, and formed a beautiful large star of red, white and blue streaks. At first nearly always in vibration until it reached the middle of the horizon, where the center of the star became red. It extended to the east and west, then passed toward the south and disappeared. Lasted about 22 minutes.

May 7—John Wise made a grand balloon ascension with his new balloon. The balloon was burned in Harford county.

May 12—A large meteor was seen between 8 and 9 o'clock. It passed from south to north, then northwest, with a rumbling noise like thunder.

May 14—Frost, killing the plants.

May 31 and June 5—Fire in stoves.

August 31—Frost in exposed places.

October 7.—This afternoon about 4 o'clock Gen. Harrison was escorted into Lancaster, on which occasion the malignant opposition showed their wisdom by directing the boys to hoist several petticoats, and carrying Van Buren flags and making some boys drunk at night.

October 8—Gen. Harrison left Lancaster without opposition.

October 12—Severe snow storm. The trees so heavy with snow many were split and many branches broke.

November 21—Began to dig at the Court House pavements, east and west, to lay water pipes.

1837.

February 20—Last night the pumps at the City water works were started for the first time, pipes pumped full to reservoir.

February 22—To-day the water was let into the basin and down East King street as far as the Court House, where a section of hose was attached to the plug at Ross' corner, when a splash of water and drunken squabble ended the solemnity of the day.

April 23—Snow about five inches deep; trees bending with weight of snow.

May 22—Small notes issued by the city—shinplaster currency.

May 27—Metallic currency panic is staring us in the face. \$60,000,000 owing to England, and all Jackson's experiment a bubble. Benton's mint-drops the only relief, and none in the market.

June 15—Began to dig on East Orange and Shippen streets to lay water pipes.

July 3—Water was turned into the pipes on East Orange, Shippen and Lime streets.

September 13—Frost in low places.

1838.

March 29—Railroad bridge near Downingtown burned.

May 3—Firemen's parade. The American Company had a boat about 18 feet long on four wheels, drawn by four gray horses, representing the landing of Columbus. The people in the boat, representing Indians, were, John L. Benedict, banner-bearer; Daniel Roth, John Booring, Conrad Anna, Adam Dellet, Mathias Zahm, and G. M. Zahm as Queen, with D. Roth's little girl as an Indian child; S. Stambach, interpreter.

May 30—About 7 p. m. fire was discovered. In about two hours the following stables were in ashes: Two belonging to Mr. W. Cooper, one on each side of the alley in the rear of West King street, one owned by Dr. F. A. Muhlenberg, one by Dr. Fahnestock. One of George Ford's and one belonging to Mrs. Hoff, in which the fire started. Supposed to have been set on fire.

May 31—About noon the walls of the city basin began to give way; by evening the northeast and south walls were down in the basin; also, part of the division wall.

June 4—Voting for school laws; polled 574 votes; only one against the schools.

July 25—Butter sold in our markets this morning at 25 cents. Outrageous!

August 1—Water turned into the repaired basin.

August 8—Potatoes sold at \$1.50 per bushel on market to-day.

September 27—The embankment outside the basin slipping away.

December 8—To-day some soldiers from Philadelphia passed through Lancaster for Harrisburg to protect the State Capitol against anarchy and misrule, carried on at the seat of government by a set of outlaws from different parts of the State. To-night several hundred more arrived here, to continue their journey to-morrow. A meeting was called to-night at the Court House to keep up the excitement. Speeches were made by G. W. Barton, R. Frazer and others.

December 9.—The soldiers from Philadelphia left here for Harrisburg—about eight hundred.

1840.

Great excitement between the political parties, and both parties confident of success. Hickory poles have been put up in every section of the city and county, in lanes and alleys. The Harrison poles are known by a log cabin and key on top. Newspaper slander is the order of the day. Each party publishes outrageous lies about the other candidate. They keep at loggerheads continually, publishing trash and nonsense disgraceful to the morals of a civilized society. Meetings were held four months before the election, and marching with drum and fife by both parties every night except Sunday.

1842.

February 16—Severe snowstorm, four to five inches deep. Many drifts, very deep; no trains from Harrisburg for three days.

June 9—The fish and ball taken from the Lutheran steeple.

June 23—The fish and ball put up again.

July 4—Flag presented to Finley's Company.

October 5—Got a ton of coal from Robert Johnston. The only ton I could get in Lancaster at the time. Paid \$5.87.

1843.

March 17—Severe snowstorm 18 inches deep on level.

March 19—Fire destroyed the session-house of the Episcopalian congregation.

May—This is the greatest time for humbugs that was ever known. An old Yankee from New York State has been preaching since last summer that the world is to end April 1, 1843. The world is to be burned, but his crazy followers are to be taken up on a large plate of glass until the fire was out, and then come down again and dwell with the elect, but when it drew nigh to the 1st of April the 3d was fixed and then the 23d. Before the 23d the shrewd Yankee came out in public print denying that he had fixed any particular date, but set the time between April, 1843, and April, 1844, so as to gull the people a little longer, and, strange as it may seem, nevertheless true, hundreds committed suicide, and as many became deranged, and many families were put in a deplorable way by this Yankee hoax. Others were going about preaching temperance, trumpeting forth their own degradation, singing ridiculous songs, selling their song books and pamphlets, relating stories about the greatest blackguards in the country, all for the good of the community and to sell their books and pamphlets at enormous prices, besides a slip collection now and then in a crowded house, which money they would smilingly pocket and sneak off without

paying for services. Weinbrenner promulgated a doctrine that unless the women (he cared very little about the men) were doused head over heels in the water by him, or his cronies, they were gone geese. So it happened that Millerism, Weinbrennerism and Yankee Temperance (humbugs) were all sprung on the people at one time, set some of the people reeling and made them crazier than ever rum did, and all for the good of the people.

Now the 23d of April is past, and nothing unusual took place. But on the 27th we had a severe thunderstorm between 1 and 2 o'clock in the afternoon; the wind blew, rained and hailed—nothing unusual for this time of the year. The storm lasted only ten minutes; the sun resumed its former brightness, and shone on the just and unjust.

June 2—All vegetables frozen. Water standing out had thin ice.

June 11—Thirty degrees colder than the tenth.

July 3—Twenty degrees colder than the 2d.

1844.

Fruit very plentiful. Cider sold for 50 cents, 75 cents and \$1 a barrel. Picked apples sold for 10 cents to 12½ cents per bushel.

May 6—A riot at Kensington, Philadelphia county; very serious. The native Americans and Irish shot each other. Burned churches and houses. The Sheriff's men refused to obey orders. Many children were trampled to death. Word was sent to Harrisburg to Gov. Porter, requesting troops.

May 9—The Governor passed through Lancaster on his way to Philadelphia. The Governor ordered 100 volunteers to follow him.

May 11—The volunteers returned.

1845.

May 31—Sold Farmers' Bank stock at \$49 and ten shares at \$49.12½.

July 11—Served notice to the subscribers to the cotton factory to be built in Lancaster; capital, \$100,000.

1846.

January 19—City lamps on East Orange street; one at A. Armstrong's, Dr. John L. Atlee's, Mr. Penrose's, at Mr. Hurford's and one at Mr. M. Zahm's, to light East Orange street, between North Queen and Shippen streets, the expenses to be paid by contributions.

March 15—Floods in Susquehanna River; part of the Harrisburg bridge washed away; the river higher than it has been for fifty or sixty years.

April 11—Mr. Gemperling's barn and stable were set on fire; the alley south of East King street; seven barns and stables east and west were burned. A stranger who was standing in the crowd was pushed down and robbed of \$1,000. Patrolling commenced to-night in Lancaster.

November 23—Sold 107 shares of Lancaster Bank stock \$33.25; \$35.75.

November 29—To-day the Moravians had jubilee, it being one hundred years since their congregation was first started in Lancaster.

November 30.—Supreme Court held in Lancaster.

1847.

April 21—This evening we had illuminations in Lancaster to celebrate the great victories of the Americans at Buena Vista, Vera Cruz, by Gen. Taylor and Gen. Scott.

June 15—Sold Farmers' Bank stock at \$50.06½; \$50.12; \$50.25. The first stock that has sold above par for several years.

July 19—This afternoon a portion of the arch on Water street caved in. A section caved in some time ago during a heavy rain.

October 20—Attempt to set fire to the cotton factory.

1848.

March 21—Sold bank stock. Farmers sold at \$49.12½ to \$49.87½, and Lancaster, \$38.

June 13.—Town meeting to appoint committee to collect money for the Allentown sufferers, who lost all by fire, which destroyed one-fourth of the city.

July—"Loco-foco" meeting at the Court House. Addresses by Sam. Houston and Kauffman, both from Texas.

August 29.—The Conestoga so low the city pumps can't work. The reservoir empty and the factory can't be supplied, but are pumping from the run. Work only every second or third day. The Water Committee refuse water for building.

September 6—Water supply shut off.

September 18—Water turned on again.

November 5—This morning before six o'clock the stack at the new cotton factory on the west side of South Prince street fell to the ground. It was about 100 feet high, supposed to contain 1,000 bricks for every foot.

November 7—Election for President. The number of votes was 2,000. This was the first Presidential election held on the same day throughout the United States.

November 22—City meeting at the Court House in reference to lighting the city with gas.

December 23—The tavern at the northwest corner of North Queen and

Orange streets sold at public sale, and bought by Jacob Danner for \$11,160. It was the property of Phil. Reitzel and Michael McGrann. I made this entry in case it is sold again during my life to see how much less it will bring.

1849.

August 10—President Taylor arrived in Lancaster this evening. He was escorted to Kendig's Hotel, Centre Square. The Court House was illuminated with 336 sperm candles. The President was accompanied by Governor Johnson and members of his Cabinet.

August 11—President Taylor was in town until noon. He received the ladies from 8 to 9 o'clock and the gentlemen from 9 to 10 o'clock.

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