

THE ZAHNISER REUNION

by

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For more than sixty years THE ZAHNISER REUNION has been a recognized institution in Mercer County, Pennsylvania. The first one was held June 26, 1875, and is believed to have been the first organized reunion of any family in that section of the country. With the exception of a few years at the turn of the century, it has been held annually ever since.

The first one was called a "Family Picnic" in the record made by Jacob Zahniser who was elected secretary of the organization formed that day, and was convened in the orchard across the road from the house of the original family settlement in Lake Township, then owned by Captain James Zahniser who was elected chairman. Approximately three hundred persons were present.

Following this the Reunions were held for a few years at that place, where I have my first recollection of attending one as a small child in 1877. At that time the bulk of the family lived in two Mercer County communities, one centering in Lake and Jackson Townships and the other in Jefferson Township west of Mercer. In view of this fact a change was made about 1880, and the Reunions were held in alternate years in the two communities. The northern location, however, was changed to the sugar grove on the farm of Porter Zahniser, a half mile south of Five Points in Jackson Township. This alternating practice continued till near the end of the century. Many of these annual meetings were largely attended and impressive affairs. Frequently a brass band was secured from Sandy Lake, Millbrook of Mercer and came in a glamorous wagon, playing as they came, so that the whole countryside knew of the event. Families from Jefferson Township usually came to the northerly location in wagon loads, starting in early morning so as to make the three-hour drive to arrive about ten o'clock. The following year the northerly group did likewise. Politicians were much in evidence, for it was said there were then three political parties in the county, "Republicans, Democrats, and Zahnisers!"

About the end of the century an effort was made to hold the Reunions once in two years but it was found interest declined. In 1896 a "Centennial Reunion" had been held in the Fisher Farm sugar grove on part of the old family settlement. It was after that the attendance declined. In 1903 a return was made to the annual meetings. In view of changed transportation facilities and the fact that the family had now scattered widely till the majority lived elsewhere than in the two older settlements, it was decided to seek one central location. For a few years the meetings were held in the Mercer Fairgrounds, then in 1906 they were moved to Orr's Grove Jackson Center, where they were held till 1933 when they were moved to Buhl Park, Sharon and finally, in 1936 to Grove City Park where they are still being held.

Three secretaries have served the Reunion Organization throughout its history, Jacob Zahniser, who served until his death in 1891, Kate M. Zahniser, who served until 1932, and Grace Harrison, who has served since that time. The family owes much to these secretaries for the success of the Reunions through the years.

The family history published under the title, "The Zahnisers" was undertaken in 1902 and published in 1906. The compilers in gathering the data drew chiefly on the following sources: A brief history of the early family written in 1875 by "Squire" Jacob Zahniser, the first secretary, and still in my possession, personal knowledge and recollections of older Zahnisers then living, particularly John L., David and my father, William A., and from data secured by a canvass of the family, of whom there were 1,432 persons then living. In excess of 2,000 personal records are included in the History. It is to be hoped that the supplement or new edition proposed at the Reunion a year ago can be completed by 1941, the two hundredth anniversary of the marriage of Valentine Zahniser and Juliana Clemens in Germany from whom the family has come. It is believed the total number will then be approximately twice that of 1906.