FRIDAY, AUGUST 29, 1975

Old Frackville Tales
Lorraine Stanton

Mrs. Mary Minahan Mettam

a most hospitable hostess

Mrs. Mary Minahan Mettam of 142 North Second Street, St. Clair was born and raised in Frackville. She was a most hospitable hostess and has many fond memories of our town. Her parents knew each other in England and when her father, William Minahan came to America he settled in Branchdale. Her mother was brought to America by relatives and settled in Lowell, Massachusetts. After corresponding a short while, Mr. Minahan visited her and they were married and returned to Branchdale. They moved to Frackville in 1873 and lived on Center Street. Her father built a house at 504 West Pine Street. This has been in the Minahan family all these years.

Mr. Minahan worked in the mines for many years and was inside foreman at Lawrence Colliery until he retired in 1912. They were the parents, of six children and to accommodate their married children and grandchildren who visited many times, he built a larger house at 118 North Fourth Street in 1915. This remained in their family until 1963 when it was sold to Mr. and Mrs. Frank Dunn.

An amusing story Mrs. Mettam told me was when the Goodwill Hose Company was first organized and there was no signal or whistle to call the firemen in case of fire. The Hose Company was without funds to install a whistle so Mr. Minahan advanced the money and the whistle was installed. He was the first one in town to use this whistle when the woods in back of his home caught fire and it was threatening his house as the grass caught fire in the garden. Neighbors tried to help by getting water from nearby wells until the firemen arrived. Naturally, he had to be fried for the fire whistle, especially since he was the one who advanced the money to install it.

Mrs. Mettam attended the Frackville Schools and graduated in 1903. She remembers Mr. Miller as being the principal and Mr. William Roberts as one of her teachers. She graduated from Women's Hospital in Philadelphia and worked in an executive position for several years.

She is an aunt to Dr. Thomas K. Hale whose mother attended Drexel Institute in Philadelphia.

She recalled shopping at Sam Haupt's grocery store on the corner of Nice and Spring Streets and John Haupt's Livery Stable at Nice and Pine Streets. She remembers the weekly newspaper, "The Frackville Star" and told me how initials were used and not names in the gossip section, but naturally everyone knew who was being chided. She said Mr. Uriah Mengle had his own philosophy and wrote many editorials about the politics in town. It was a small but interesting paper. She recalled Mr. Alexander Scott having a general store in town but also having one in Gilberton with Jay Jameison as the manager. Everyone bought "in the book" and the bill was paid every two weeks.

She remembered the store owned by Mrs. Bridget O'Donnell where fresh meats, groceries and Bunner's home made fresh bread was sold. Miner's caps, gloves, and socks were also sold here and many miners patronized this store because they knew the financial hardship placed on this young widow with several children to raise. "She was a very energetic and positive woman," said Mrs. Mettam. She made a success of this business and bought the Haupt Building on the corner of Nice and Pine Streets. This building was only used as Haupt offices prior to this and was known as "The Big Nothing" for many years. Mrs. O'Donnell had an Ice Cream Parlor in this store and Mrs. Mettam remembers buying ice cream at five cents a dish and staying here all evening singing and playing the piano. As Mrs. Mettam said, "she bought a big nothing, and made it into something.

In later years, Charlie O'Donnell operated this store and many families recall how he "carried them over the rough times of the depression." Charlie Miller her son-in-law worked here later. He was the father of Mrs. Eleanor Hale, twins, Charles "Daw" and Edward and Robert Miller.

I had a most enjoyable visit with Mrs. Mettam and she was too glad to talk about the good old days of Frackville.