

# Mabel Reist Koch: Editor, Author, Poet

Mabel Reist Koch was born at Mount Hope, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania on February 17, 1889. The O in her last name is pronounced like the O in our English word “LOVE”; and Mabel herself is remembered as a loving and generous woman whose personality and humor endeared her to many.

Mabel began this life with many disadvantages. At an early age Mabel’s father, Martin, and her mother, Susan, separated and Mabel was left with only her mother. But soon her mother became a victim of “consumption”. Before she died she brought little Mabel here to Manheim, asking Mabel’s paternal grandfather (the local wheelwright) to take Mabel and raise her. After her mother’s death, Mabel was made an “indentured servant” to her grandfather by means of a legal document that was signed by her father. This document is in the Foundation’s archives. But happily the relationship between Mabel and her “Grandpa” was a very loving one which she fondly remembered for the rest of her life. After her aunt, Annie Koch, married S. Charles Ensminger, the local druggist, Mabel ended up living with them. When their daughter, Jean, was born she referred to Mabel as her “sister”. Although the two were actually cousins, they were close like sisters. Mabel soon began to work in the Ensminger Drug Store on North Prussian (Main) St. This store also had an ice cream parlor and Mabel invented a sundae and named it “the Jigger”. Whether this is the origin of the Mt. Gretna “Jigger” is not completely certain, but some have said that is was. Due to the fact that many of the customers could speak only in the Pennsylvania German dialect, Mabel felt a need to become fluent in speaking “Dutch”. Mabel also learned photography. Early photograph studios were often attached to drug stores, for druggists had the needed chemicals for photography. The Ensminger Drug Store had a photograph gallery beginning as far back as the Civil War Era. Mabel was 22 years old when another tragedy occur in her life: Her beloved “Grandpa” was injured and died as a result of a terrible fire that occurred at his brother Fred’s house.

Much later in life Mabel began to work for the Manheim Sentinel Newspaper, and near the end of her life she was the editor of that journal. Town historian, John Kendig, claimed that Mabel was the person who gave him encouragement to begin writing. She suggested that he write some stories for the newspaper. Mabel herself wrote short stories in the dutchified English of the country people. They were written under her pen name, Cora Grumling. She also wrote some serious pieces of poetry, modestly using her initials M. R. K., as in *The Baron’s Rose*.

As the president of the Manheim Women’s Club, Mabel was privileged to be a part of the festivities which honored William J. Gies as Manheim’s ambassador to the World. William J. Gies was the son of Ophelia Ensminger Bear and the grandson of John M. Ensminger who in 1841 published the first newspaper in Manheim, “The Sun”. Doctor Gies was internationally known for dental research.

Mabel Koch passed away at the home of her dear cousin, Jean Ensminger Mentzer in Ephrata on March 29, 1955. She is buried with her uncle and aunt on the Ensminger plot up on Fairview Cemetery. Although Mabel passed away 50 years ago there are still those of us who love and remember Mabel. Lovingly someone provided a special fund so that even to this day a pot of mixed flowers is placed each Memorial Day at the headstone of Mabel and her uncle and aunt.