

NOTED MUSICIAN VISITS HERE

Submitted by Village of Richfield Springs Historian Harriett Geywits

One of the great attractions available to those who visited our health resort was that of the concerts, given on a daily basis at both the Earlington Hotel and Spring House as well as in Spring Park. We can only imagine the sight of the properly clad orchestra members, mainly from New York City, gathered in the hotel ballrooms or the music stand, bringing enjoyment to visitors with their talents.

Such a musician was Anton Fuerst. A boy prodigy, he started giving violin concerts at an early age. In this area, he appeared as first violinist in Lombard's Spring House orchestra and in Stubblebine's Earlington orchestra. His study and career continued in New York City and during the summer, he again returned to Richfield Springs, eventually taking over the leadership of the summer orchestra at the Earlington.

In 1933, an article was published in the *MERCURY* regarding Professor Fuerst, directed to the citizens of this area, reminiscing of his time in the village.

"Professor and Mrs. Anton Fuerst of New York are very welcome guests at Bloomfield's (former Earlington Hotel) and plan to spend some time here. Professor Fuerst's presence will be very interesting and pleasing news to those of middle age who knew the resort in the 80's and 90's when Prof. Fuerst contributed greatly to the pleasure of the guests and villagers alike. He first visited Richfield Springs in 1886 being the first violinist in Louis Lombard's Spring House orchestra and at the time, was one of the most brilliant of the young musicians of the United States. He was with Lombard two seasons and then played for a like period under the leadership of Prof. Stubblebine.

In the early nineties, Professor Fuerst directed the Spring House orchestra himself and his work as leader won him much distinction. During his leadership he had some of the best talent in the country in his orchestra and many celebrated special artists. Among these were the great prima donnas, Marie Roze and Cecelia Abrams; Bloomberg, the phenomenal cellist, and others of equal note. (The Spring House burned in 1897) Prof. Fuerst also conducted a band of fourteen pieces at

neighboring Sharon Springs at that time.

For twenty years he was with Oscar Hammerstein as general musical director and opened every house the distinguished impresario built. He also directed the music at the famous old Thalia Theater, so well known to the German citizens of the earlier generation. (Originally Bowery Theater - later named the Thalia Theater, destroyed by fire at least four times and rebuilt until the final destruction by fire in 1929). He also was director of the Hammerstein's Harlem Opera House, built in 1889, the first of his theaters.

Twenty-three years ago, Professor Fuerst retired from the musical world and opened a catering place known as 'The Wallace' at 152nd Street, New York City. Here he established himself and continued until a few years ago with one of the best known and most successful places in the metropolis.

Prof. Fuerst was in Richfield Springs when it entertained the elite of the nation and his reminiscences of the resort of that day are very delightful. He recalls vividly the fashionable men and women who were habitués of our resort and the events of the that period. In 1901 he organized an orchestra among the boys of the village and was most liberal in his talents for local entertainment. He pleasantly recalls playing at the Presbyterian and Episcopal fairs and in the old Summer Theater. He taught many of the children of the summer guests.

One of the delightful memories of the Professor is connected with the presence of his first wife and their six-month old baby in Richfield. The mother and babe were in the old Spring Park as the Professor and his band were playing from the music stand. One of the distinguished guests came up to the child in the perambulator and slipped a tiny gold ring over its finger in token of her appreciation of the father's music. Probably of all the compliments the Professor has received during his distinguished career, none was more valued than this testimonial.

Professor Fuerst pays a decided compliment to the present management of the Hotel Club, praising its cuisine, its service and hospitality. Coming from one of the most successful of New York City's restauranteurs, this is a rare



compliment and much appreciated by those who have to do with the conduction of the club." (The Hotel Club was a combination of Bloomfield's, the Berkley Waiontha and the Tuller House which started in 1924 as a joint effort to maintain and increase the popularity of the summer resort.)

A brief description of one of the balls at which Prof. Fuerst and his orchestra played in 1895 was given as follows: "Grand Subscription Ball at the Earlington: A bright social event of the season was held in the dinning room of the Earlington where the room was handsomely decorated and delightful under the glare of electric lights. Early in the evening, young and old began promenading down the grand hall and soon the dining room was well filled and gaiety was in full bloom. The chairs on the sides of the room were filled with animated spectators. The richness of fashionable dresses has become astonishing this season and on no occasion has there been such a display of fine

gowns as was noticed here. At the sound of the first note by the orchestra, which was made unusually large by the addition of four musicians who came especially for this occasion, everyone was entertained with delight." These subscription balls were given each season to help raise funds for music used by the orchestra.

Professor Fuerst, born in Germany in 1867, was first married to Genevieve Hoehn who died after a long illness. His second wife was Ernestine Besser. His family included three children. While his career was successful, Fuerst had his share of problems through the years, including a bankruptcy and being arrested for selling liquor after midnight at the restaurant. Law suites were brought against him as a member of the Musical Mutual Protective Union regarding pay given to fellow musicians.

Regardless of any problems that arose, he had only the best memories of his time spent at Richfield Springs.