

OLD SAUERKRAUT

Good day everyone...it's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.

A Pennsylvania Dutchman, Joseph Hiester of Reading, was the oldest man ever to enter the governorship and the first one of our Governors to decline to run for a second term. He was the most German of the Pennsylvania Dutch Governors. Hiester spoke broken English and was called--affectionately--"Old Sauerkraut" and Old German Gray". And he was the first man of considerable wealth to hold the office of Governor. Hiester was the only child of an immigrant, raised by a stepfather when his dad died when he was five. Entering business with his father-in-law, he was worth an estimated half-million dollars, probably one of the richest men in Pennsylvania in his time. Hiester fathered six children. His son John married the daughter of Frederick Muhlenberg, who had been twice defeated for the governorship. His daughter married the Rev. Henry A. Muhlenberg who was twice a gubernatorial candidate. When she died Muhlenberg married another of Hiester's daughters. "Old Sauerkraut" had raised troops and fought as a colonel in the Revolution. He was imprisoned by the British and later wounded at the Battle of Germantown. After the war he became one of Pennsylvania's leading politicians. He had great influence over the German vote. Hiester became a state legislator and was elected the first Senator from Berks County. Then he succeeded his uncle, Daniel Hiester in Congress, and spent 14 years there. He had been mentioned as governor for a number of years. In his first

fight he lost to William Findlay, but the next time around he was elected in a bitterly fought contest against Findlay, his majority a little more than 1,000 votes. Hiester was a month more than 68 years when he became governor. The people described him as "old and honest". In his inaugural, Hiester declared that he would serve only one term. Though few Germans did, Hiester supported public education. He launched the first large state debt to build highways. He was opposed to slavery and saw to it that the state drew up rigid laws against bringing slaves into the state. Like his predecessors and successors even today, Hiester was troubled by the difficulties of patronage under the spoils system. He tried to make appointments on merit and compromise. But the press was highly partisan in those days and blasted him. In his retirement message he said that he had spent 50 years in public service and had played a part in his country's history from "colonial vassalage to independence and sovereignty", and so he had. He was eager to retire and let history be the judge. He was a good governor, a good man. And although Hiester is a common name in the German countries, no direct descendants are left of "Old Sauerkraut", Joseph Hiester.

This is Pete Wambach. It's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.