

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

"Sale of the Fireman's Hall"

Carroll County Times Article for 24 September 1995

By Jay A. Graybeal

The Westminster Fire Department has outgrown its fire hall, put its building up for sale and is moving to a new location. If this sounds familiar, you may be surprised to learn that it happened a century ago. The story appeared in the August 31, 1895 issue of the Westminster American Sentinel.

The executive committee of the Westminster Fire Department disposed of the engine-house and hall belonging to the department, to Sheriff Elias B. Arnold, on Saturday last, for the sum of \$4,700 cash. In making the sale the committee reserved the fire bell and also required an agreement that if the cornerstone shall ever be removed it shall become the property of the department. The sale is regarded as the best ever made of Westminster property. The lot on which the engine house stands has a frontage, on East Main street, of twenty-two feet and it is estimated that the price paid is fully equal to \$175 per front foot of unimproved ground. About \$135 per front foot was the maximum previously paid for ground in the same vicinity. The transaction is an evidence of the growth and progress of this city. The town has not been boomed at all, but there has been a solid and substantial advance in its material prosperity, and this condition has been plainly indicated by this and other recent sales of property, and the erection of a number of handsome private residences.

The erection of a new engine house on the lot owned by the department on East Main street, within half a square of the property sold to Sheriff Arnold, will add another to the public buildings of the town, and there is a general desire on the part of the citizens that a structure shall be erected in keeping with the present condition and future prospects of the city. The lot referred to has a frontage of nearly 100 feet and is splendidly located for the purposes and convenience of the department. But this is not all. It is the very spot for a public hall of such dimensions as will accommodate conventions and such entertainments and exhibitions as it is desirable to attract to the place, and also for a market that is becoming one of its imperative needs.

The lot is owned absolutely by the department, which, from the sale of its other property and cash in hand, has now, it is said, a building fund of about \$5,000. An engine house, with offices, a market, with a dozen stalls, and a hall or opera room of satisfactory size can be erected, it is said, for ten thousand dollars. Hall, markets and offices would give the department an income sufficient to meet interest on an indebtedness of \$5,000 and leave a handsome surplus, annually, towards liquidation of the principal.

We trust the department will see its way clear to the erection of a building of the character and for the uses referred to. The situation offers the golden opportunity, and perhaps the only one, to secure to Westminster an eligibly located market and opera house. We are certain the department may be sure that back of any danger of failure, of which there would seem to be no possibility, is a generous public that will not hesitate to reach out a helping hand to crown such an enterprise with ample success.

The fire department has cause to be proud of what it has achieved in the course of its fifteen years of existence. It is the owner in fee of as handsome a plot of ground as can be found in the city for a firemen's building—a property worth three times or more the price paid for it—and has, besides, a fund half sufficient to erect such a structure as is desired. The remainder can easily be procured as a loan, at a low rate of interest, and the people of Westminster can be trusted to sustain any enterprise designed to diminish and eventually wipe out such indebtedness.

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

It appears that history is about to repeat itself as the Westminster Fire Department prepares to serve the public in the next century.

Photo caption: The members of the Westminster Fire Department posed in front of their hall in this turn of the century image by Mitchell's Art Gallery of Westminster. Historical Society of Carroll County Collection.