

"R.F.D. Banquet"

Carroll County Times Article for 29 April 2001

By Jay A. Graybeal

Following a contested beginning in December 1899, Rural Free Delivery mail service was soon embraced by most Carroll Countians. The developers of the new system celebrated with a dinner on April 30, 1900. The May 5 issue of the Westminster Democratic Advocate newspaper had a lengthy article about the event under the headline "Postmaster-General Smith and Other Postoffice Officials Visit Westminster, are shown the City and Banqueted":

"The visit on Monday of Postmaster-General Smith and several heads of divisions in the Postoffice Department was quite a compliment to Westminster and Carroll, in view of their exacting duties, and particularly so now while Congress is in session and continual demands are being made by committees of that body for information upon all sorts of subjects.

They came, as was told in the ADVOCATE last week, to attend a banquet tendered them by the citizens of Carroll and Westminster, in honor of the successful inauguration of a rural free delivery system in Carroll, providing daily mail communication between the people, delivering and collecting mail at their very doors, in sunshine and in showers, when the roads are good, or deep with mud or banked with snow. The banquet was given, also, in recognition of the honor done Carroll in being selected as the county to try the new system.

Through the courtesy of Col. John M. Hood, President of the Western Maryland Railroad, a special train was in waiting at Union Station, Baltimore, to bring the distinguished guests to this city, who arrived on the Washington Limited. At the station, as a committee of escort, was Mayor Fred. D. Miller, Postmaster Schaeffer, Charles C. Gorsuch, Comptroller Hering and Chas. E. Fink. The run was made to this city in fifty minutes. At the station here, besides the committee of reception, were a larger number of citizens. The visitors were presented to their escorts by the gentlemen who came on the train with them, and they were taken to view the four rural wagons, which were standing opposite the postoffice, when a thorough inspection was made of each. Open carriages were then occupied and a drive through the city was given the visitors. Along the route many houses had flags thrown from their windows in honor of the guests, and the Fire Department building was open for inspection and their large flag suspended across the street. To the regret of all the atmosphere was so thick from the smoke of forest fires that the beautiful vista from Western Maryland College hill was obscured to a large extent. From there they proceeded out College Avenue to Pennsylvania Avenue, to Main, to Belle Grove Square, to Liberty street, to Main, to Centre, to Willis, to Court, down Main to Church, where the drive ended, owing to repairs of culvert, thence to The Westminster, where Mr. Harry E. Crout, the manager, and his efficient clerk, Mr. Charles Eckenrode, assigned the visitors to their respective rooms.

About 7:30 the committee and guests assembled in the large parlor on the second floor of the hotel, which had been beautifully decorated with cut flowers and potted plants by the deft hand of Mrs. Crout. When all were formally presented to the Washington guests a summons to the banquet hall was followed by a visitor being assigned to a member of the committee, and the line of march was started for the hall to a beautiful march rendered by the Westminster Orchestra, and whose sweet strains floated through the hall during the serving of the elaborate menu, which was published last week in these columns. The hall was tastefully decorated with bunting, cut flowers and potted plants, while the electric globes and the lights from numerous candelabra shed a charming glow on the table, set in the form of the letter U. A card at each plate designated the occupant of the seat with a handsomely

embossed menu card and a carnation boutonniere on the plates. The embossing on the card was an exact representation of Wagon C in gold and blue.

Fully an hour and a-half was spent in discussing the menu, when Mr. T. Herbert Shriver, of Union Mills, who presided, announced the following toasts, which were responded to:

#### TOASTS AND RESPONSES.

"The President of the United States," by Postmaster General Smith.

"Rural Free Delivery," by Hon. George M. Allen.

"What We Think of Rural Free Delivery," by State Comptroller J. W. Hering.

"Comparisons of the Present with the Past," by A. W. Machen, superintendent of the free delivery system.

"What I Think of Carroll County," by Special Agent Eugene H. Hathaway, who had charge of the introduction of the new system here, and by whose untiring industry, affability and tact many of the objections to rural free delivery were overcome and its efficiency proven.

Postmaster Smith, replying to the toast, "The President of the United States" said in part:

I am exceedingly glad to meet this most interesting company. So far as this occasion is complementary to myself I have not words to express my gratification; but so far as it is a celebration of the establishment of rural free delivery, it is of full importance to the country at large."

The newspaper article continued with additional remarks by Postmaster General Smith and other officials. All correctly predicted that Rural Free Delivery would have a significant impact for rural residents of Carroll County, Maryland and the nation.



*Firemen march past the Westminster Hotel during an early twentieth century convention. The new hotel was the scene of an April 30, 1900 dinner celebrating the success of Rural Free Delivery. Historical Society of Carroll County, J. Leland Jordan Collection, gift of the Commissioners of Carroll County, 1955.*