

"The Westminster Band Brings Home the Bacon in 1931"

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By Jay A. Graybeal

The volunteer fire company or department is a proud tradition in Carroll County communities. The company provided a means for combating fires and also a organization for men and later for women through an auxiliary. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Maryland firemen held an annual convention which usually featured a parade, demonstrations and a variety of contests with fire fighting equipment. Some conventions, including the one held in Ocean City in 1931, also featured a band competition. The Westminster band accompanied the local firemen and a description of the event appeared in the July 17 issue of the Westminster Democratic Advocate newspaper:

"The Westminster Fire Department and Band arrived home at midnight Friday from the Maryland State Firemen's Convention which met at Ocean City July 8, 9 and 10, in a jubilant mood, as the band brought home the bacon, \$100, for the best band in line of parade.

The firemen and band left Wednesday morning at 6:35 and arrived at Ocean City at 12:15 p.m. in a Blue Ridge line bus. They traveled by Green Spring Valley to Towson to Havre de Grace, Elkton, Dover to Ocean City, about 190 miles. As the party arrived near Ocean City they were met by Mr. Francis N. Keefer, drum major of the band, who lead the way to the limits of Ocean City where the Company and band formed into line and marched to the hotels, amid cheers of the citizens.

Wednesday evening was spent by enjoying a band concert given by the Westminster band on the boardwalk and at the Del-Mar-Va Hotel, and taking in the attractions of the resort.

Thursday passed off in sight-seeing with a pajama parade by the Westminster Band at 11 o'clock at night which was followed by several hundred people cheering as they passed down the board walk. A show given for firemen only was also a night attraction which was given in a boardwalk theatre. One firemen from Westminster will remember one of the feature acts.

On Friday morning at 11 o'clock the firemen's parade was the feature. The parade was led by Gov. Ritchie, Comptroller William S. Gordy and Mayor William W. McCabe.

Twelve hundred firemen, representing 83 Maryland and Delaware fire units, paraded.

Included in the line of march which extended for nearly two miles, were ten bands, 42 trucks, three auxiliary groups, three bugle and drum corps and 26 companies of men in uniform.

Parade winners were a follows:

Best Appearance With Band and Apparatus—Susquehanna Hose Company, Havre de Grace.

Best Place of Apparatus—Waterwitch Hook and Ladder Company, Annapolis.

Largest Company with Band—Salisbury Fire Department, Salisbury.

State Company Coming Longest Distance—Barton Fire Department.

Out State Best-Equipped Company and Apparatus—Laurel (Del.) Fire Company.

Out of State Company for Distance —Minquadale (Del.) Fire Department.

Best Band In Parade—Westminster; second, Chestertown.

Best Bugle and Drum Corps—Wilcomico Post, American Legion, Salisbury; second, Dorchester Post, American Legion, Cambridge.

The North East Ladies, Firemen's Auxiliary all dressed in white satin won first prize for the best auxiliary in parade.

About 4 o'clock Friday Captain Parnell came walking down the boardwalk and asked to see Colonel Keefer of Westminster Band, saying that he had a prize for them. On opening the envelope a check for \$100 was exposed. The surprise was so great that a mighty whoop went up and again the band showed their appreciation and paraded the boardwalk among the cheering crowd.

Members of Westminster Fire Department taking part in the convention were Frank T. Shaeffer, Michael E. Walsh, Edw. O. Diffendal, Francis N. Keefer, J. Gloyd Diffendal, Frank B. Dillard, James Pearre Wantz, Jr., Ralph Royer, Edward B. Orendorff, Wilbur Weller, J. H. Ryland and Claude Buckingham.

It is proposed to present a bill before the next General Assembly, Sergeant Bargangni said, urging that today be set aside annually on which Maryland firemen will observe national firemen's day.

Ladies' Auxiliary groups announced before State firemen that a temporary State ladies firemen's auxiliary had been formed with Mrs. John Fainter, Hyattsville, Md., as president, and Mrs. Geneva Forrest, Riverdale, Md., secretary.

"Uncle Joe" Walling, Baltimore, who, although nearly 80 years old led the parade of the Maryland State firemen during the convention at Ocean City last week, said he is planning a hike to Salt Lake City and return before the opening of the World's Fair in Chicago in 1933. It will be somewhat in the nature of a workout, since he also plans to walk from Baltimore to the fair grounds upon his return." The \$100 purse was a princely sum in 1931. In this early year of the Depression, a pound of coffee cost 20 cents; a pound of peanut butter, 21 cents; and two cans of tomatoes were 15 cents.

Photo caption: Members of the Westminster Band in concert in front of the Hastings Hotel, Ocean City, Maryland in July 1931. Historical Society of Carroll County copy photograph collection, gift of Walter Bell, 1983.