

Carroll Yesteryears

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Joe Getty, A Cornerstone of Carroll County History

By Mary Ann Ashcraft

As Carroll County celebrated its 186th birthday this week, many important names naturally came to mind. One of them, Joe Getty, may best be remembered in 2023 as the former Chief Judge of Maryland's Court of Appeals. However, for those who enjoy Carroll County history, Joe's name rang a different bell, that of important local historian.

Growing up in Manchester where his father was the mayor and his mother's roots reached back to the 1700s, Joe was surrounded by history and politics. He remembered "all those political discussions around a pot-bellied stove in my father's workshop. People would talk politics and solve all the world's problems."

As a student at Washington College on Maryland's Eastern Shore, he majored in American studies, then earned a master's degree in American civilization from George Washington University in 1980 and his law degree from the University of Maryland in 1996. But it has been his passion for Maryland history, particularly that of Carroll County, that has endeared him to history lovers.

Those of us who do research find Joe's name everywhere we turn, in the reference books we pull off the shelves, on a reproduction of an early Carroll County map, on applications to place historic properties on the Maryland Historical Trust, and as executive director of the Historical Society of Carroll County (HSCC) from 1987 to 1994.

Before coming to the HSCC, Joe served several years as Acting Director of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. He founded the Noodle-Doosey Press which published a range of books, many relating to Carroll County. Noodle-Doosey is a 19th-century nickname for his hometown of Manchester where residents with Pennsylvania-German heritage often hung noodles outside to dry.

Anyone researching old houses in the county is likely to run across Joe's name from the period when he surveyed historic sites as the architectural historian employed by Carroll's Department of Planning and Development. When important houses, churches, and other buildings came to light, Joe documented their architecture, past owners, and significance for the Maryland Historical Trust. Later Ken Short did the same job before that position was eliminated from the county budget. No one is currently keeping watch over significant landmarks and documenting them before they disappear under a bulldozer's blade.

Joe remembers first using what he described as HSCC's "treasure-trove" of historic material in 1975 after college graduation. Access to those treasures led to many of his publications although the inspiration for his book "Uniontown – A Walking Tour" likely came from his grandmother Henrietta Roop Twigg and a great-aunt Isabelle Roop Hendrickson. They grew up

on a farm outside Uniontown in the 1890s and “enchanted me with stories about Uniontown. . .and provided many insights on that period of Uniontown’s history.”

When he published “Carroll’s Heritage” in 1987, a book of essays covering our geography, geology, Native American culture, early settlers, and many aspects of local architecture he acknowledged that his work was just the beginning. He understood more research needed to be done although he had already spent almost 15 years doing it.

During Joe’s tenure as executive director of the Historical Society, he and Jay Graybeal tackled extensive restoration of the Shellman House, the centerpiece of the Society’s campus on East Main Street as a team. The Society secured a state grant (\$50,000) and mounted a successful capital campaign (\$186,000) to fund the work. The plan included returning the floor plan to its 1807 configuration, restoring selected architectural details, installing modern mechanical systems and repainting interior and exterior woodwork with period colors. While much of the work was finished on the ground floor, a lot was never finished. Approximately 30 years have passed since that restoration and HSCC is faced once again with repairs to the lovely old building.

Joe continued to be involved in publishing books that have enriched our understanding of local history such as “Excerpts from the Engine of Liberty and Uniontown Advertiser,” “Carroll Record Histories,” and the popular reprint of “An Illustrated Atlas of Carroll County, Maryland” first published in 1877 by Lake, Griffin, and Stevenson. Joe surrounded himself from the mid-1970s until the mid-1990s with a network of people whose enthusiasm for history matched his own. Those associations enabled him to produce the large body of important work which historians rely upon today.

Even during retirement Joe will probably continue his long-term passion for history. He recently finished an article for HSCC’s “Carroll History Journal” on Manchester’s cigar industry. He firmly believes in documenting and recording Carroll’s rural ways of life, evaluating the past to determine what is worth retaining, and then ensuring that we preserve what we deem important.

Mary Ann Ashcraft is a volunteer at the Historical Society of Carroll County.



Joseph M. Getty, a former state Senator and Judge, served as executive director of the Historical Society of Carroll County from 1987-94.