

Carroll Yesteryears
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Remembering the 50th Anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg by Mary Ann Ashcraft

It seems appropriate in the month of November when we celebrate Veterans Day to spend a few minutes thinking about another event involving veterans that took place June 29-July 4, 1913. Three of those days marked the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, and they offered an opportunity for a reunion of Civil War combatants from both sides.

The 50th Gettysburg Reunion became the largest ever for Civil War soldiers with over 50,000 attending. Any honorably discharged veteran from either side was invited. In anticipation of the huge numbers of veterans who might attend, the State of Pennsylvania and the U.S. War Department combined forces to ensure adequate accommodations, food, and other facilities for the aging men. When the event ended, most people agreed that the elaborate planning had paid off and the camaraderie between former foes was remarkable. When recounted today, some incidents bring tears to your eyes.

Abraham Bankert, a toll gate keeper on the turnpike linking Westminster to Littlestown and Gettysburg counted 215 automobiles, 103 motorcycles, 24 bicycles, and 57 buggies passing through his Silver Run turnpike gate on June 29th. "It was the largest number of vehicles that ever passed in one day." Who knows how many visitors from Carroll County poured into Gettysburg via other routes.

Quite a few former soldiers from Carroll County were able to attend. At least 20 names appeared in the local newspapers – names such as James S. Bare/Baer, John H. Mitten, Levi Myers, Henry Wardenfelt, Whitfield and Alpheus Stansbury, Lewis Shipley, and George W. Armacost. Many of the attendees had served in the Sixth Maryland Volunteer Infantry, Companies A or C, or were members of the Potomac Home Brigade. Not everyone who came had actually fought at Gettysburg, but they had fought in battles elsewhere. Some local men probably went for one day, while others settled into the tents and participated in all the events, eating their meals in a giant mess tent, enjoying the water fountains during the hot July weather, and spending time reminiscing. Jacob Royer, who had served in the Sixth Maryland, came all the way from Kansas. He likely stayed at the massive campsite. Afterwards he visited his brother Uriah in Taneytown before going home. Samuel D. Webster of St. Louis, MO, stopped in Westminster on his way home because he once lived here.

Robert and William Shriver of Union Mills hosted a large number of their friends at a camping party from July 3rd through the 7th. They pitched tents for the guests along Big Pipe Creek; supplied food prepared by a Baltimore caterer; offered tennis; a dance at the elegant Shriver residence known as "Avalon;" and an automobile trip to Gettysburg on the night of July 3rd when a giant fireworks display was scheduled. According to one Carroll County newspaper, "It will require a train of ten special cars to carry the fireworks and equipment to the Gettysburg battlefield for the semi-centennial celebration."

President Woodrow Wilson spoke movingly to the huge crowd. “We have found one another again as brothers and comrades in arms, enemies no longer...”

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



Photo credit: Historical Society of Carroll County

Photo caption: John H. Mitten (1844-1931), seen here in his Grand Army of the Republic uniform, was a local Civil War veteran who attended the 50th Reunion of the Battle of Gettysburg in 1913. He served in the Sixth Maryland Volunteer Infantry, Company A, for nearly 3 years.