

Carroll County Times “Carroll’s Yesteryears” Articles

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History award named in honor of Lillian Shipley
By Joe Getty

When I was a young boy growing up in Carroll County, trips to the “History House” of the historical society were a great experience. My grandmother, Henrietta Roop Twigg, made sure that I received an early education in local history, and the historical society was the premier cultural organization of Carroll County during that time. And I can recall not only the “History House” tours, but also the special excitement of events co-sponsored by the historical society during the early 1960s, including the Civil War Centennial and the Westminster Bicentennial.

At the center of Carroll County’s local history activity was Lillian Shipley. She had the foresight in 1939 to propose the formation of the historical society to save the Sherman-Fisher-Shellman House as a historical and community center. She worked very closely with Test Kimmey to give birth to the organization. In 1953, she became the first curator and developed education programs for the public schools and the general public.

Her work was a community legacy. Her leadership provided for the development of an excellent decorative arts collection. The many activities and educational programs under her supervision were honored by national recognition.

Shipley was also the leader for many special events of Carroll County. She was always involved in local dramatics and assisted Dorothy Elderdice with the historical society play *The House that Jacob Built*. In addition to the newsletter and bulletins, she assisted with major publications such as *Just South of Gettysburg*. She was instrumental in the organization’s early exhibits, including historical flags, dolls, glass, teapots, lusterware, and the Taneytown Bicentennial exhibit.

Moreover, her memory of local facts and her knowledge of Carroll County history were legendary. In the mid-1970s, when I first became serious about the study of Carroll County history, I relied on the expertise of Vivian Barnes for various projects, and many times we would be working on an obscure local history topic and Punky would say, ‘We will have to ask Miss Lillian about that – she will know the answer.’ And sure enough she did, whether it was about Indians, architecture, agriculture, communities or family history.

I only had the opportunity to go with Punky to visit Shipley a few times, but I was overwhelmed by her enthusiasm for the study of local history and her dedication to Carroll County. Not only

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did she have the facts and figures, but she could tell many little anecdotes that provided a deep historical perspective.

She loved to talk about travelling with her father Daniel F. Shipley on his doctor's visits in the horse and buggy days, and how they had one of the first automobiles in Westminster. Her father would point out to her the natural and historical points of interest and recount the legends and early history of this region. In turn, years later Miss Shipley used this knowledge in her tours, articles, and work in building the historical society's collections and educational programs.

Through her work, one would learn about how different things were in the past. Many anecdotes were revealing about our heritage, especially in the way that she would fill in details on the background of historical artifacts. One story that she told was this example about her mother's beaten biscuits:

"Beaten biscuits – they were one of the things that the women would make to raise money for the Methodist MITE Society. For a Society project, each woman was given ten cents to develop something to sell and give the proceeds to the church. My mother made beaten biscuits and they were special. You don't put anything in to make them rise. Instead, you beat the air into them. We had a big block, it was the stump of a tree, and you put a cloth over this and your flour and water was kneaded so that it would be sort of doughy. Flour and water and salt was all that you used and you put the dough on the stump. You had a regular hatchet that you beat it with. You would put them on the stump and beat them until they would crack. Then you would roll them into round balls and take a fork and put a little design on the top with the tines of the fork. Then they were baked in the oven. The beaten biscuits were sold at the church and they were 10 or 15 cents a dozen. From the proceeds from projects like this, the women in the MITE Society bought the pulpit furniture for our church."

Anecdotal history is an important facet of any community history program. Our education committee today is using the same techniques that Shipley used as we develop an educational package integrated with the public schools curriculum. In addition, the historical society created in 1989 an annual awards program in honor of Lillian Shipley and her foresight about education and local history.

The Miss Lillian Shipley Heritage Education Awards is a program about understanding local history and its relevance to today. This year's project for seventh-grade students required an essay on the "Past, Present and Future of Carroll County." You are invited to attend the awards ceremony on Thursday, May 7th at 4:00 p.m. in the Shriver-Weybright Auditorium, 210 East Main Street, Westminster.

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We believe that the Miss Lillian Shipley Heritage Education Awards program is an exciting way to celebrate the memory of Lillian Shipley. The Heritage Education Awards program is an exciting way to celebrate the memory of Lillian Shipley and the devotion shown throughout her career towards working with young people and educating the community.

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Historical Society of Carroll County

Photo caption: A feature published in the Washington Sunday Star Magazine in 1959 included this photo of Historical Society of Carroll County curator Lillian Shipley explaining documents from the manuscript collection to James Kyler.