

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

"Carroll Record Women History"

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By Joe Getty

As we advance in years, our minds wander back to the days of our childhood, when we sat around the log fire listening to the old folks' tales of the early settlers along the Monocacy, where we feel sure the curl of smoke from the wigwam and camp fire brightened the night, as the old folks used to tell us. In the field joining Jesse C. Weybright's buildings, which was then a swamp, there was a spring to which the deer came to drink, and lick salt, and there also the braves came to hunt, but now the poor Indian has departed, and left us to enjoy his former lands.

At the Historical Society, however, we are not just interested in the prominent residents of our communities. We are also interested in what is called "everyday history." How did regular people, like you and I, spend their typical days, say 100 years ago, or 200 years ago.

The source materials for learning this information are few and far between. So the historian of everyday life has to work like a detective to combine resources and compile an overall portrait of everyday life. These resources include writings, diaries, business records, public records such as court cases, artifacts, and oral traditions. Newspapers from after the Civil War through the early 20th century also provide a fascinating glimpse of everyday life activities within our Carroll County communities.

In looking at the role of women in Carroll County, I am going to focus on one unique source of information that combines oral history and newspaper publications. This is a series that the Historical Society will publish this fall for the first time in book format as *The Carroll Record Histories of Northwestern Carroll County Communities*. When the Carroll Record newspaper was founded in Taneytown in 1894, its editor, Preston Englar, conceived the idea that a weekly article about local history would attract subscribers.

He drew upon his friends in the various communities who were long time residents to write down their memories of the history of the community, and the historical anecdotes that had been told to them by their parents, grandparents, friends and neighbors. The flyer that you have lists the communities covered and provides an additional background about this series.

I skimmed the manuscript of the combined articles for references as to the role of women in the communities and found some interesting facts.

While we do not think of women as having been in the business community long ago, there were some women who participated in the commercial affairs of their towns. Frank Devilbiss in his "History of New Windsor" describes Catherine Brawner. In 1841, she was the only woman on the Board of Directors of the New Windsor Library Company, which was incorporated by the state legislature in January of that year. As early as 1825, she had opened a female academy in New Windsor and Devilbiss states: "Her efficiency as a teacher became recognized, and the young from far and near all attended Miss Brawner's school. For many years she very successfully conducted this school which gained in influence and members' until the support grew in the community to establish a college.

With regard to her business acumen, she also served for the longest period of time as the postmaster of New Windsor, from 1828, to 1844. Devilbiss, writing in 1895, states "It will be noted that Catharine M. Brawner served the longest term of office--19 years. This looks as if Andromaniacs existed at that early day and that business efficiency in woman is not confined to the present era of her struggling ambition

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in business and bicycling." I looked up Andromaniacs in the dictionary and was unable to find such a word. Androgenous however, means having both male and female characteristics. In the context of the Victorian male stereotypes of the late 19th century, it is apparent that Devilbiss was paying a tribute to Mrs. Brawner.

The Carroll Record histories contain other example of women's contributions throughout our history. Women are listed as educators, musicians, poets, writers and artists. In fact, women are frequently listed as historians, the male writers in the series frequently have to give credit to a women in the community who is recognized as the town historian. There are also other community postmistresses, for example, the town of Linwood had tow in the late 19th century, Mrs. D. F. Albaugh and Mrs. E. J. Rouzer.

Artifacts play a role in interpreting the role of women in Carroll county as well. Samuel Weybright describes two artifacts that in the 1890s were viewed as passe _ the scrub broom and the Dutch oven in this excerpt;

If the farmer possessed a team, plow, harrow and wagon, he was ready to farm, with what the wife brought, usually, cows, riding horse and saddle, spinning wheel and scrub broom. Well, what was a scrub broom? When we were about four years old, we wandered off over the snow banks up one and down the other, until we got to the woods, and here we found some we were acquainted with; Angel's- but not of the celestial kind. They would select a small choice sapling from four to six inches in diameter and take a cut about five feet long. The bark was taken off, splits were drawn down about a foot in length over the larger end, until the handle was about one inch or so in diameter. The splits were tied down, the handle dressed off and the broom complete, ready to be used in scrubbing the rooms and kitchen, as carpets then were little used.

The broom stick has always been considered women's chief weapon of defense; we pity the poor erring man, chastised by the good wife when she had one of these weapons at her command. As the Yule-tide draws near, we are reminded of an Xmas dinner with Benjamin Poole, in the long ago, when he lived with his grandmother, Katy Biggs, widow of William.

It was one of the dinners that were cooked in the Dutch oven in the large fireplace. It was the manner of preparing roasts and baked pies, in one of these vessels, placed over hot coals and coals on the lid. You may talk of your fine roasting pans but none can get up a more savory meal that one of the old "Aunty" slaves, used to prepare in the old way.

While we consider the advances of technology in the 20th century, it is interesting to observe the nostalgia for the old days as expressed by a writer in the 1890s, 100 years ago.

In addition to their work in the household, women also help out in the fields, and probably not enough attention is paid to this role of women. An excerpt from J.W. Reck's "History of Harney" provides an illustration:

During this period, all of the grain was cut with the cradle, and it was customary for nearly all of the women to help in gathering the harvest; some raked, while others would bind, but as a general thing the women done all the raking, and we are told that the Eckes girls were considered very good hands. One harvest while John Hess was cutting grain on the farm now owned by Frank Null, one of the girls raked after him, and she raked up so close to him that in finishing up her sheaf she would always take the last cut as it would drop from the cradle. Mr. Hess was afraid of cutting her and told her several times to stay back, but she kept no account of his warning, but rather kept getting closer and closer, until the

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point of the cradle scythe cut her apron string in two and it dropped down on the ground; this frightened both Mr. Hess and the girl, and after this narrow escape she could keep back far enough to be out of danger.

I hope that you have enjoyed these few brief excerpts from the Carroll Records histories. The Historical Society will be publishing them and in addition to the original histories ...

Photo Caption: [None]