

## *Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles*

Carroll's Yesteryears  
07 April 1991

1940s marked beginning of Carroll as suburbia  
by Joe Getty

Historical societies are typically viewed by the public as dealing with the long, long ago. There is an inherent perception that history deals with only the earliest periods of time, such as the colonial era, or with major events, such as the Civil War.

At the Historical Society of Carroll County, however, these views are misconceptions and we are working to bring the public's view of local history up to date by investigating themes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The work of the local historian is to deal with everyday life in his locality. Therefore the daily lives of our citizens up to the present are very much a part of Carroll County's heritage.

A 20<sup>th</sup> century social tradition in Carroll County was the practice of holding community dances in the school gym. For the historical society's major fundraiser of 1991, we will be recreating this tradition with a 1940s style dance at Gill Gymnasium at Western Maryland College. The theme of this fundraiser provides an opportunity for our staff to research and document Carroll County activities and events that occurred during the 1940s.

It was a decade that began with Carroll County's families still feeling the effects of the economic depression of the 1930s. World events played a dominating role in the daily lives of our citizens, especially with the entry of the United States in World War II.

A review of our county's 1940s newspapers show that Carroll County was an active participant in all aspects of the war effort. When Company H was mobilized, the war had a major impact on the lives of our citizens as natives of Carroll County went to serve overseas.

Our residents supported the war effort by participating in a number of projects: purchasing war bonds, contributing to annual Red Cross drives, and recycling items used in manufacturing. Wartime rationing had an effect on local businesses and especially with the management of Carroll County's farms.

Significant efforts were made with local organizations and campaigns during and after World War II. Our citizens participated in the Civil Defense and Minute Men organizations. FATS for Victory and Bundles for Britain supported the military and wartime relief programs. German POWs worked on the family farms in Carroll County. Gold Star Mothers were honored and at the end of the war our community dedicated memorials to local servicemen.

The postwar period brought many changes to Carroll County. An era of economic prosperity began and many suburban features began to appear in this region. The Veteran's Village was constructed near Western Maryland College for servicemen to take advantage of G.I. benefits.

## *Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles*

Modern issues such as sex education in public schools were being discussed as public policy. The prominence of the automobile in daily life became evident with the closing of B&O Passenger railroad service on the last day of the decade.

Changes also occurred in the fabric of social life in the county. Movies became an even more important form of entertainment and presented views of an urban, modern American lifestyle. Local fashion became more sophisticated as citizens adopted popular national designs over more traditional rural patterns. Other changes marked the evolution of Carroll County from an agrarian to a suburban society.

The Historical Society is fortunate to have a photographic representation of this decade in the John Byers collection of local photographs. Byers documented local businesses, activities of service organizations and other events through his photography work throughout the county. Included in this collection are photographs of the social life of this period in Carroll County's history, including views of local dances.

The local newspapers also highlight the popular local dances held throughout Carroll County's communities. The Democratic Advocate describes one extravaganza that depicts the interest in national music trends:

"One of the nation's top semipro orchestras, Bob Astor, will play at the May Ball on May 27 in the Westminster Armory. The Ball is an annual affair sponsored by the American Legion. Boasting one of the most versatile bands in the land, Astor holds promise for the best dance music to hit the city in some time...Fronting his popular band, Astor has appeared at the Wm. Penn Hotel in Pittsburgh; Bradford Hotel, Boston; Frolics Club, Miami; and Pelham Health Inn, N.Y. City and many of the South's smartest supper clubs."

The Carroll's Yesteryears columns over the next month will explore a number of themes of Carroll County life during the 1940s. It was a time of great change for our communities, and many of the suburban characteristics of Carroll County today find their roots in this period of our mid-20<sup>th</sup> century history.

The Historical Society of Carroll County is sponsoring A Celebration of the 1940s on May 11. It is a fundraising event that will feature a dinner/dance with big band music by the Carl Hamilton Orchestra. The dance will be held in Gill Gymnasium at Western Maryland College and attire is 1940s style. For information, contact the historical society at 848-6494.

*Photo credit: Courtesy of Historical Society of Carroll County*

*Photo caption: This DeMolay Teenage Dance took place at the Armory in Westminster November 15, 1946.*