

Carroll's Yesteryears
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Beyond the farm: County's 19th-century labor force was more than agricultural workers
By Joe Getty

Labor Day was first recognized in 1882 as a holiday to honor laborers for their many contributions to the American economy. Peter J. McGuire, founder of the union named Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, proposed Labor Day as a means to bring public attention to the oppressed conditions of many workers.

What was Carroll County's work force like in the late 19th century?

The pages of *An Illustrated Atlas of Carroll County*, published in 1877, provide a glimpse of the various industrial pursuits in this region. This atlas is being reprinted by the Historical Society of Carroll County and is now available through a prepublication offer.

The primary labor force in Carroll County consisted of agricultural workers. Small family farms, such as the Solomon S. Ecker farm illustrated in the atlas, required a work force that frequently exceeded the number of family members residing on the farm. Farm hands were especially needed during the harvest season, but many were employed year-round on local farms.

While we think of Carroll County historically for its farming, there were also a number of industries scattered throughout our 19th century communities. Many local industries served the agricultural community by manufacturing products out of the farmers' crops.

Grist mills were the largest industry and used water power for grinding feed and flour. Saw mills manufactured lumber from local woodland and cider mills produced cider and vinegar. Laborers also worked at several specialized mills, such as the George W. Keller paper mill in Houcksville and the woolen manufactory run by Shepard Wood on the Hard Lodging property near Union Bridge that is now owned by the Historical Society.

Tanneries were a major industry throughout Carroll County. The atlas includes an illustration of the Shriver Tannery at Union Mills. The tall smokestack indicates that the employees at the tannery used steam power to manufacture leather out of the hides brought from surrounding farms. This tannery specialized in oak-tanned sole leather. The atlas includes business references for similar tanneries owned by William H. Hoffman, Uniontown; A. Appold, Manchester; Charles Schaeffer, Westminster; and Julius King, Snickersburg.

Also at Union Mills, the Shivers were innovators with the early canning industry. The company formed by B. F. and T. H. Shriver placed a business as in the 1877 atlas as packers of fruit and vegetables. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, canneries were scattered throughout the county and required a large summertime work force.

Manufacturing cigars out of locally grown tobacco required hand-rolling that was primarily done by women. Photographers of local cigar companies show the equipment and work areas used by women to produce large quantities of cigars. The atlas lists the following cigar manufacturers: Samuel Lilly, Manchester and Charles V. Wantz, Westminster.

Another area of industry represented in the atlas business references were suppliers of products needed by the agricultural community. Foundries and machine shops produced plows, threshing machines, steam engines and other agricultural implements. These manufacturers included: W. T. Haugh, Taneytown; Adam Shower, Manchester; John Koontz, Silver Run; Samuel Hughes and the Taylor Manufacturing Company, Westminster. A related industry were the wagon-makers such as George C. Minor, Freedom; F. K. Herr & Brother, and G. W. Close, Westminster.

Extractive industries have a long tradition in this region. Farmers needed lime for their fields. Lime was also produced for the building industry by lime quarries and kilns in the Westminster area owned by: Thomas P. Goodwin, Josephus A. Orndorff, William Bachman, Henry B. Riegel, Joshua Corbin, William H. Orndorff, E. Bankard and Jacob Myerly. The business references also contain an entry from lime burner James W. Ogle, Union Bridge.

Another traditional employer in Carroll County has been the educational institutions and businesses such as banks and insurance companies. A number are represented in the atlas business references. Old Main at Western Maryland College as it appeared in 1877 is illustrated by a lithograph.

The reprint of the 1877 atlas being produced by the Historical Society also includes a tribute to Carroll County families, businesses and institutions today. A 1993 historical supplement includes histories prepared by donors to the Historical Society's Legacy Campaign. If you would like details about the atlas prepublication offer, call (410) 848-6494.

Photo credit: Historical Society of Carroll County

Photo caption: The illustrations are lithographs originally published in the 1877 edition of An Illustrated Atlas of Carroll County, Maryland. A reprint of this atlas is available through a prepublication offer by the Historical Society.