

“Carroll’s Law and Order League”

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by Jay A. Graybeal

The ratification of the 18th Amendment in January 1919 ushered in Prohibition but also spawned efforts, legal and otherwise, to thwart the ban on the sale of alcoholic beverages. A majority of Carroll Countians had supported Prohibition and some took an active role in supporting its enforcement. The efforts of the newly formed Law and Order League for Carroll County were described in the August 6, 1926 issue of the Democratic Advocate newspaper:

“The executive committee of the Law and Order League for Carroll County met in the Community Room, 3rd floor, Wantz Building, Monday evening, August 2nd. The extreme heat made the evening very uncomfortable, yet there were ten of the thirteen districts of the county well represented, with the county president, and the county secretary of Woman’s Christian Temperance Union present.

Mr. George Mather, president of the organization, presided. Rev. E. R. Spencer, pastor of the M. E. Church, in Mt. Airy, led in prayer. The purpose of the meeting was to consider plans towards perfecting the organization throughout the county, and what methods of work to pursue to accomplish most before the primary election, September 14th. Each vice president was advised to increase his working force by adding three men and three women to the committee in his district. The names of these persons to be sent to the county chairman as soon as named. It was unanimously decided to have ten thousand cards, with the object and purpose of the League, printed and sent to the workers in the different districts for distribution at once. The cards to be signed by persons willing to become members of the league, and to read as follows:

‘We, citizens of Carroll County, in view of present efforts intended to discredit and nullify laws enacted by both State and Federal government, do solemnly subscribe to and declare the following principles to be essential to the stability of our State and Federal government, and to the security of life, liberty and the common welfare of all loyal citizens.

‘1st. We subscribe to and defend the Constitution of the United States of America and the Constitution of the State of Maryland, and we denounce as enemies of our country and State all those who would nullify the provisions of the same, but grant the right to any citizen or citizens to advocate amendments thereto by the orderly methods prescribed therein.

‘2nd. We believe the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States was and is the expressed will of the majority of the citizens thereof, and that the Federal Congress and the Legislature of the State of Maryland should respectively enact such laws as are necessary for the enforcement of the Amendment.

‘3rd. We believe that only such persons as hold the aforesaid principles as essential to the proper administration of the law, can truthfully and without equivocation or mental reservation, subscribe to and keep and perform the oath of office required of legislative, judicial and administrative officers.

Therefore, we hereby pledge our support to the nomination and election of only such candidates for legislative, judicial and executive offices, who freely and unequivocally subscribe to these principles.’

Our Government is for the people and by the people, it is therefore not only the privilege, but the positive duty of every citizen, both man and women twenty-one years of age to express themselves at the election in November, as to what laws shall govern, and who shall represent them in the respective offices of the county and State. To do this they must be duly qualified by registering their names in their election districts. The first registration to be September 7th. There are now less than 60 per cent of the men and 40 percent of the women in the county registered. It was unanimous that the most important work at this time was, if possible, to get all persons to register, and at the same time get responsible, reliable and qualified persons for whom to vote after registering.

Mass meetings for Westminster and the larger towns in the county are considered, and a committee appointed to plan for them."

Prohibition and its enforcement remained controversial topics until the 18th Amendment was repealed by the ratification of the 21st Amendment in December 1933. While the demise of Prohibition was disappointing to some, the ensuing celebration began the flow of much needed tax dollars into Depression era government coffers.



*Mr. George Mather, photographed in his Westminster garden in 1958, led the Law and Order League for Carroll County in 1926. The organization promoted the enforcement of Prohibition. Historical Society of Carroll County, gift of Robert Breen, 1958.*