

"HSCC Meeting 1939"

Carroll County Times article for 1 August 1999

By Jay A. Graybeal

During an unusually harsh winter of 1939, local residents met to consider the formation of a county historical society. Their main goal was the preservation of the historic Shellman House at 206 E. Main St. in Westminster. The property was being sold to settle the estate of Mary B. Shellman and was threatened with demolition for the construction of a gas station. This Federal-style brick residence had been the home of three prominent local families from 1807 until the mid 1930s and there was strong sentiment for saving the structure throughout the county. The recent county centennial in 1937 had also sparked interest in county history so the time was ripe for founding an organization that would have the broad mission of dealing with county history.

As winter gave way to spring, the fledgling group incorporated in April 1939 and began plans to acquire the Shellman property. An article in the August 4, 1939 issue of this newspaper described one of the early meetings:

"An open meeting of the Carroll County Historical Society was held at the Opera House Monday evening.

Ex-State Senator, J. David Baile, president of the society, presided and Mrs. Paul Wimert, acting secretary read the minutes of the last meeting and also the treasurer's report. The treasurer's report as of July 31 showed 241 annual members, with dues of \$241; life member fees, \$95; and home fund, \$108. The expenses have been \$29.40, leaving a balance on hand of \$414.60.

Mr. Baile told of his conference with the mayor and city council in reference to securing a room or rooms for the society in the city's recent purchase of the Longwell Home for a community center. While there have been no final plans made for the use of the building, it is probable rooms can be secured there at a nominal rent.

Miss Lillian Shipley, chairman of the membership committee, reported that throughout the county there were people keenly interested in the society. It was reported that 11 of the 20 \$50 contributions for the fund for the purchase of the Shellman Home had been secured.

Mrs. Harry M. Kimmey stated the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the purchase of the Shellman Home and she told of the efforts by the society to secure the home. Mrs. John Smith strongly urged the purchase and spoke of the historic value. She had extracts from Scharf's History of Western Maryland in reference to the home.

Col. T. K. Harrison spoke of the importance of preserving historic papers and articles and thought the Shellman House an ideal place for the purpose.

Miss Carrie Mourer, Professor T. M. Whitfield, John H. Cunningham, Miss Dorothy Elderdice, Mrs. John L. Bennett, Mrs. Robert S. Coane, Sr., Mrs. G. Norman Hunter, Jr., Mrs. F. D. Leizear, Rockville, before marriage Miss Marie Baile, New Windsor, and Mrs. N. R. Hett, Gettysburg, spoke. The majority of the speakers expressed sentiment for the purchase of the Shellman house, as it was claimed to be the oldest house in Westminster, about the only remaining one of colonial architecture and by reason of being the home for so many years of Miss Mary Bostwick Shellman it should be preserved.

Some doubt the wisdom of the society starting with a large indebtedness that would be difficult to provide for. It was urged that an intensive campaign be made to secure the needed 20 \$50 contributions before the public sale of the Shellman property, Saturday, August 12.

Some antiques, relics and papers were exhibited. Norman R. Hess, a member of the Board of County Commissioners had a homespun linen table cloth made from Carroll county flax and woven in Hanover. Dr. A. G. Tracey, known for his old land records displayed two interesting land grants of Transylvania, 1752, and Rattle Snake Ridge, 1739, in the vicinity of Hampstead. Both bore the seal of the Province of Maryland. His collection numbers 260 grants. Mr. Cunningham had a die of 1850 of the Farmers and Mechanics National Bank from which currency was made. Two wooden shaking forks were sent by Elder William E. Roop. An old picture of the house of the late Dr. D. F. Shipley, East Main street and Center street, later rebuilt by him and now owned by James A. Trayer, was on display. A fat lamp and hanger of 1800 was shown. Interesting old papers loaned by Miss Addie Manahan, including a tax receipt of Levi Manahan to Jacob Holmes, collector, showing 35 cents on the one hundred dollars in 1868; also an old gauge of 1816 and handmade nails, and a rag doll shown by Miss Edna Erb. William Eckenrode has donated a bound copy of the briefs of a prominent Carroll County attorney, the late Guy Wakeman Steele. This brief deals with a case tried before the Court of Appeals. The dates in the book range from 1899 to 1914. A Farmers' almanac of 1819 found ready readers.

A number of the districts of the county were represented."

The article provides a fascinating look at the formative months of the Society as the members struggled with mission and fund raising to meet their ambitious goal. Fortunately, the visionary members prevailed and the group saved the Shellman House and launched a new organization dedicated to preserving our rich historical legacy.

Photo caption: Ex-State Senator and Historical Society of Carroll County president J. David Baile presided over the organization's early meetings. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert McKinney, 1980.