

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

Carroll's Yesteryears
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Humorous stories not uncommon in turn-of-the-century newspapers
By Joe Getty

The recent columns about Leap Year traditions in Carroll County have provided a glimpse of local humor as presented in late 19th century newspapers. Frequently, newspapers during the turn-of-the-century presented a diverse range of humorous anecdotes, some of which mocked the serious news stories.

For example, public records were used to document whether the tradition of Leap Year proposals occurred locally. The January 4, 1873, edition of the *Democratic Advocate* stated: "Leap Year – By references to the report of the number of marriage licenses issued by the Clerk of this county in the course of last year, it will be seen that the girls did not avail themselves to their leap-year privileges to the extent that they might have done. There were only two more marriage licenses issued in 1872 than were issued in 1871."

The Leap Year tradition that a woman could propose to an unmarried man was also the topic of this story from the *Democratic Advocate* of March 6, 1908:

"THE OLD, OLD QUESTION

A Westminster Girl Takes Advantage of Leap Year

One of our young men last week received the following letter:

"My Dear Friend – The time has come when I must ask you a question, one concerning something which has cost me many sleepless nights, also days of anxiety. This is a subject upon which I have hesitated to speak to any one about, and I have known a whole community to be upset completely and many happy homes have been broken up by the same trouble. Yet I must know the worst. I dare not communicate my state of mind to my mother, for, as you know, she is old-fashioned concerning these things.

"In my distress I appeal to you. It may surprise you to have me turn to you in this trouble, but I know you so well, I feel that you understand me and that your heart is ever open to me; also, I am assured of your affection for me, and therefore I know that my troubles are yours also. While you are considering this, I beg of you to put away all cares and all social pleasures and devote your time and faculties to the proper consideration of this question which I am about to ask you.

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"Now, my dear, I want you to answer me truthfully what your thoughts are in this matter, and I promise never to tell any one, as I feel that this is too serious a matter to jolly bout. Another thing, it is between you and me and no one else, but I must come to the point. When do you think we will have warm weather?"

Much of the local news was written by correspondents from communities scattered throughout Carroll County. Their columns contained considerable community boasting. There was also a healthy competition of one-upmanship in topping each others' storytelling. An example is from this turn-of-the-century contribution from the Hampstead correspondent:

"A Carnivorous Cow

Mr. Daniel Bush, of the vicinity of Houcksville, has a cow that possesses a remarkable fondness for spring chickens, not as companions, but as an article of diet. Bovine animals are glassed as graminivorous, and so they are, as a rule that we supposed was without exception; but Mr. Bush's cow couples decided carnivorous qualities with her ordinary nature, and these were recently exhibited by a raid on some fine spring chickens, kept in coops, probably to secure them from harm at the teeth of this voracious animal. The story goes, and is well authenticated, that one day last week, this strange cow attacked one of the coops, containing eleven chickens, and speedily demolishing it devoured the feathered bipeds with extreme gusto, one after the other in quick succession. This might be regarded as a pretty square meal, even for a hungry carnivorous cow, but did not satisfy the appetite of this bovine, which immediately proceeded to smash another coop and gobble its occupants, seven in number, without ceremony.

"Of course, Mr. Bush is carefully guarding his remaining flocks of spring poultry against further raids from this epicurean milk giver, but the ruminating animal quietly chews the cud and watches her opportunity. Perhaps, if the habit of feasting on tender chicks is kept up, her lacteal fluid may turn to genuine chicken soup."