

Carroll Yesteryears
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Preserving History in a Pandemic
By Mary Ann Ashcraft

The Historical Society of Carroll County has preserved and shared county history since its founding in 1939. The year 2020 was no exception, but there were significant accommodations necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Even before the pandemic began, the Society's Marketing Committee recognized the power of social media and began a concerted effort to use the HSCC website and its Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts to reach people who enjoy history. Once social distancing and shutdowns began in March, the committee noticed that attention to social media expanded dramatically as people spent more time on their computers.

The Society's daily Facebook posts included historical photos and facts, announcements of virtual events such as the Box Lunch Talks, Talks at the Tavern, scavenger hunts, and videos made by board members and volunteers that offered intriguing information on aspects of local history. One post even shared Thelma Hoffman's 1948 recipe for the cinnamon rolls she served to the boarders and guests at Hoffman's Inn. Hoffman's Inn became a restaurant—Cockey's Tavern. Then, in 2000, it was purchased by the Historical Society, restored, and became a learning center and gallery. Recently HSCC began posts on small, unincorporated towns in the county which have drawn great interest. Every Friday there are blogs by the curator featuring items from the vast HSCC collection plus their accompanying history.

Although not every computer user participates in Facebook, those who do have left encouraging comments such as "I love these history pieces!" "Thank goodness for recorded history." "Interesting! I always like reading the history of small towns." "I remember as a little boy in the 1950s . . ."

An Historical Society volunteer compiled many of the Facebook offerings and kept track of how often they were viewed. Posts that included photos reached, on average, 7,500 viewers, and a post on the history of Frizzellburg shared 115 times reached an amazing 19,418 people and elicited 206 comments. Hopefully, these glimpses of Carroll County history encourage people to seek out the locations and learn more about them, especially while COVID continues to prevent large gatherings.

For many years, the Historical Society has offered monthly Box Lunch Talks—one-hour presentations of topics relating to Carroll's past. These presentations were moved online using Zoom technology and many of them can be viewed on YouTube through the Carroll Media Center and on the HSCC website under the heading of Education. Anyone wanting to join Box Lunch Talks can register on the Historical Society's website where there is a list of future topics including the 2021 Carroll County Birthday presentation by Kevin Dayhoff on January 23 at 2 p.m.

But what about the Society's role to preserve the history of 2020? Early on during the pandemic HSCC encouraged people to submit their experiences and observations in the form of home-made videos, letters, photographs, etc. These were important to add to its history collection. Anyone who still wishes to contribute can send their material to: info@hsccmd.org.

The following are excerpts of submissions received during the first months of the pandemic:
Contributor 1:

"The first big change in our house had to do with internet. Our farm lies between two relay towers in a "dead zone." Our internet service has always been spotty and has been insufficient for working or studying from home. This had to change.

"The kids rented a trencher from Ben's Rental and dug a 450-foot trench for a Comcast cable. We now have wicked fast internet and enough TVs and programming for everyone in the house to enjoy their own media preferences! This has been crucial when we've had enough 'together time.'

"The second big change was the way we celebrated our son's graduation . . . with a drive by party! We stood near the driveway in masks and gloves and handed out sealed fizzy waters and goodie bags (including candy and a face mask) as friends and family drove by honking and waving from their cars!

"We are the lucky ones. All are healthy and our situation is fortunate. We have been enjoying quarantine for the most part. We like being at home and being together. We have plenty of room indoors and out, and distractions. I've been busy cleaning and organizing the basement (a long overdue task) and there are plenty of books, games, television shows, music and computer programs, to round out the day. All try to run or walk or do a yoga session.

"I also love the gift this has been for the environment. I love that children are being cared for by their parents and there is more family time: to play and cook and learn and be creative. I love that there are more people outside. I love that we are not in cars. I love the shift to working from home, and the peace of giving each other more space. I hope we can carry some of this into our brave new world!"

Contributor 2:

"My life has changed a lot because of COVID-19. School closed on March 13th. The first 2 weeks of quarantine we had packets of work, then we had Google classrooms for the next 4 weeks and maybe more. We have not been out very many places. Schools and malls are closed. Restaurants/fast food are doing take-out orders. You can NOT eat food inside. We have found some ways to entertain ourselves at home by playing outside and playing games! Me and a lot of other people miss going to school because we want to see our friends. I've been feeling a little stressed and overwhelmed, but mostly happy to be enjoying time with my family! This virus can be stressful for many people."

Contributor 3:

“My school has switched to distance learning on Google Classroom. I usually get about 18 assignments per week. My assignments take about 6 hours a week to complete. I am very happy that it is 6 hours a week compared to 35 hours per week in regular school. It lets me be able to see my mom and dad a lot and talk to my friends. I am able to talk via video games and Zoom lunches.

I am kind of sad about sports though. My flag football season was canceled just like the NBA, NHL, MLB and MLS seasons. Thankfully, the NFL season does not start until September so that has not been canceled. . . Overall, I am starting to go insane and nutty. I need things to start opening back up.”

Contributor 4:

One sequestered week in April 2020:

- Phoned a 94-year-old friend and FaceTimed family members
- Watched 5+ hours of a Woodstock DVD
- Got carry-out Reubens from a local restaurant
- Reviewed old scrapbooks filled with memories
- Walked several miles outside
- Joined a 30-car caravan that drove by the home of friends with signs, balloons and horns to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary
- Picked up “deliver-and-go” groceries

Contributor 5:

“Driving through Westminster and crossing Rte. 140, you couldn’t miss the decrease in traffic. It seemed as if the roads were left to tractor trailers plus an occasional passenger car. And the price of gas, if you even needed it, was well below \$2.00/gallon. That absence of traffic also applied to the air. Rarely are there any condensation trails left by planes flying in and out of BWI Airport.

“People I’ve never seen before began running or walking up and down the back roads in my rural neighborhood. I watched the father of five children walk the family dog alone each evening. He said it was just to get a psych break! You could use the middle of the road to walk most of the time.

“Each day brings requests by mail or email for donations to charities helping people here and across the globe. There is no doubt how many are suffering and we private citizens need to help if we can. The “Carroll County Times” frequently carries information about local restaurants which continue to offer carry-out. We need to help them stay in business.

“Our lives have been affected in so many ways, both good and bad. Needless to say, this should be a wake-up call to the world that every country needs to consider itself a part of the planet and no one can go it alone. As television reminds us nightly – ‘We are all in this together.’”

Mary Ann Ashcraft is a volunteer for the Historical Society of Carroll County.



Image 1: Submitted photo – Wearing face masks became essential during the pandemic. While some people used disposable paper ones, this image shows cloth masks hung up to dry for use another day.

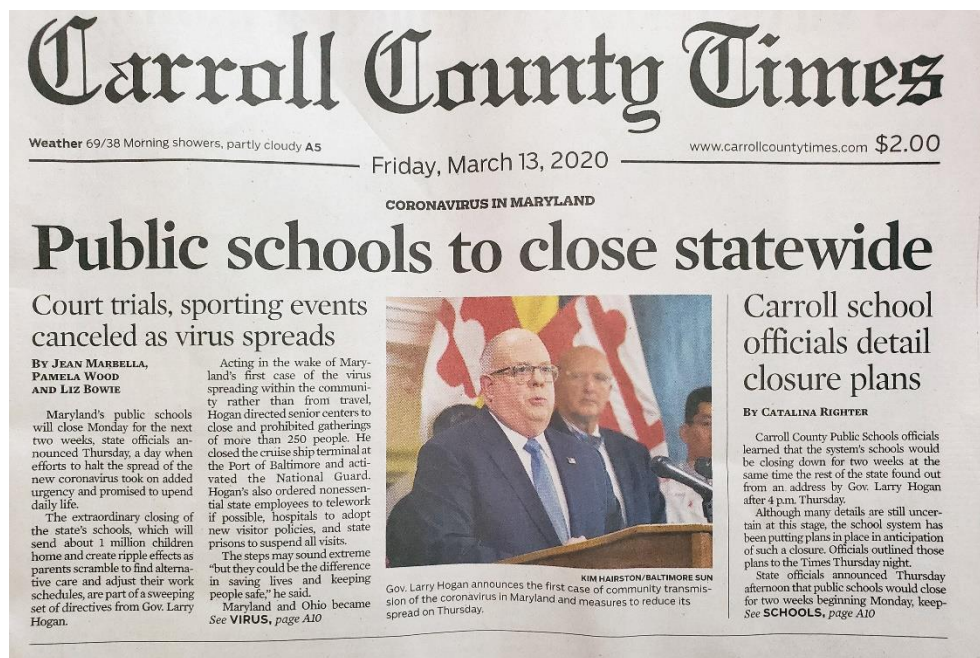


Image 2: Submitted photo – This headline from the March 13, 2020, issue of the Carroll County Times marked the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic as public schools across Maryland shut down.