

"The Farmers' Reunion and Picnic, 1899"

Historical Society of Carroll County article for 8 August 1999

By Jay A. Graybeal

During the late nineteenth century, Carroll County farmers participated in a variety of activities designed to promote agrarian pursuits. Beginning in 1869, an annual county agricultural fair was held on the Westminster Fairgrounds. A century ago, local farmers attended a "Farmers' Reunion and Picnic," a day-long educational event that featured speakers on a variety of topics of interest to farmers. The story was front page news in the August 5, 1899 issue of the Westminster American Sentinel newspaper:

"The absence of Governor Lowndes from the farmers' reunion and picnic in the grove at Otterdale schoolhouse, on Saturday last, was a disappointment to those who had the affair in charge and to many of those who were in attendance. The Governor had accepted an invitation to be present on the occasion and his presence was confidently expected, but important business prevented the fulfillment of the engagement. A letter to the committee of arrangements explained the cause of his inability to be with them and expressed his own personal disappointment in the matter. His absence, however, did not materially interfere with the success of the reunion, which had a definite purpose and, it is hoped, may mark the inauguration of a method of carrying scientific information to the very doors of the farmers, many of whom are unable to attend regular farmers' institutes in the county centres. The attendance at the reunion was extraordinary, there having been, it is estimated, about two thousand or more persons present. The exercises began shortly before 12 o'clock. The morning had been given over to Otterdale Sunday-school, which participated in the occasion and which was addressed by Rev. C. A. Britt, of Trinity Lutheran Church, Taneytown. The school was under the superintendence of Mr. Wm. H. Shriner, Mr. Oliver Stonesifer being secretary, Levi D. Sell librarian, Miss Olive Garner organist and Mr. H. J. Hilterbrick leader of the singing. At the conclusion of the Sunday-school exercises Judge Harry M. Clabaugh took the stand, and on behalf of the committee of reception made an eloquent and earnest address of welcome to members of the faculty of the Maryland Agricultural College, who had arrived shortly before, and other invited guests. Then an elegant luncheon, prepared by the wives of the farmers in the vicinity, was served to these guests, to whom it was intended this hospitality should be confined, but so abundant was the provision made that several hundred persons partook of the repast, and the hospitality of the people of the neighborhood seemed to be unbounded.

After luncheon Capt. R. W. Silvester, president of Maryland Agricultural College, was introduced and spoke at some length. Comfortable seats had been provided for several hundred people, but many of the farmers stood in a mass about the stand and listened with intense interest to the speaker, whose address was a practical appeal to the farmers to ascertain and employ the best and most scientific methods of agriculture, and to unite in efforts to procure the best remuneration for their products and for their common interests.

Others who addressed the people were: Prof. H. J. Patterson, director of the Experiment Station and chemist at the Agricultural College; Dr. H. B. McDonell, professor of chemistry at the college and State Chemist; W. T. L. Taliaferro, professor of agriculture, and James S. Robinson, professor of horticulture, all of whom dwelt upon the particular subject pertaining to their respective stations in the Agricultural College.

The speakers courted interrogatories upon the subjects discussed and much information was elicited in reply to questions, propounded by persons in the audience. Judge Clabaugh closed the exercises with a neat little speech.

The grove in which the reunion was held in admirably adapted to the purpose and the arrangements for the occasion were excellent. The committee in charge had the speakers' stand tastefully decorated with the national colors and had erected at the approach to the grove a handsome arch bearing the word 'Welcome' in large and bold characters. And in this case the word was not a mere formal greeting, without real meaning. Members of the committee mingled with the ever increasing crowd of visitors, answering inquiries and giving such information as was sought, with untiring energy and good nature. The editor of the SENTINEL, who had the good fortune to be present, received many courtesies and experienced an exceedingly pleasant time while on the grounds, and it gave him great pleasure to acknowledge these kindnesses on the part of members of the committee and others.

The reunion was held under the auspices of the Copperville Farmers' Club, which has reason to be proud of the great success which attended it.

The committee of arrangements was constituted as follows: W. K. Eckert, chairman; W. E. O. Hiner, secretary; W. H. Flickinger, Copperville; Percy H. Shriver, Solomon Myers, Trevanion; J. N. O. Smith, Lewis Hemler, Taneytown; Charles Myers, Eli M. Dutterer, Middleburg."

If the attendance estimate of 2,000 plus was accurate, the number of participants was equal to slightly less than 10% of the county population. The attendance figure becomes more significant when one considers that most people traveled by horse drawn vehicles or simply walked.

Photo caption: Otterdale School students and their teacher posed in c.1893. A grove near the school served as the location for the "Farmers' Reunion and Picnic" in 1899. Gift of Kenneth N. Hull, 1999.