

## *Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles*

Carroll's Yesteryears  
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House recreates the look of an era  
By Joe Getty

The Sherman-Fisher-Shellman House is the historical society's house museum at 206 East Main Street in Westminster. The house is open for regular visitation on Thursdays and Fridays from 1 to 4 p.m.

This year the furnishings of the house will reflect research accomplished over the past several months about cultural preferences for household furnishings among the German and English residents of Westminster during the 1800 to 1820 period.

The house museum will also contain a display of military artifacts used by the late Atlee W. Wampler Jr. This exhibit will open at 10 a.m. May 25, prior to the Memorial Day parade in Westminster. These artifacts include uniforms, accoutrements and photographs that comprise a recent donation to the historical society collection by Mrs. Atlee W. Wampler Jr. The exhibit will also be open Thursdays and Fridays during the month of June.

It is the goal of the Historical Society to furnish the Sherman-Fisher-Shellman House so that it accurately reflects the historical periods and individual residents of the house based upon extensive documentary research. The tour of the site encompasses architectural history, occupants, furnishings, interior design, domestic activities and landscape history.

For the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, period photographs of interiors are extremely useful for the historian interested in local furnishings. The historical society collection contains an excellent archives of photographs of the Sherman-Fisher-Shellman house during the Shellman period of residency. An example is a view of their Victorian parlor with its romantic view of history as evidenced by the engraving of George Washington above the mantelpiece, spinning wheel, and other family heirlooms.

The problem for the historian is how to document and recreate interior furnishings for the periods prior to widespread use of photography in Carroll County. How do you determine the style and details of the furniture, textiles, glass, ceramics and other household furnishings? How do you determine the placement of items within the rooms? A number of documentary resource materials must be analyzed and interpreted to determine the patterns of furnishings for a specific locality, such as Westminster.

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To determine appropriate furnishings authentic to original occupants, the Jacob Sherman family, the historical society has undertaken a research project to study the personal property inventories of the estates of Westminster men who were Jacob Sherman's contemporaries. This research included a review of a variety of public documents such as tax assessments, census records, wills, probate accounts and land records. Historical society volunteer Alden Venn compiled data from these documents by reviewing microfilms of the originals.

A predominant theme at the Sherman-Fisher-Shellman House is the distinctive characteristics of the Pennsylvania German culture in Piedmont Maryland. The personal property inventories contain substantial evidence about the cultural differences between the German and English residents.

To assist in analyzing the data, the historical society drew upon the expertise of the Rev. Frederick S. Weiser, a Pennsylvania German scholar. The Rev. Weiser also coordinated a special research visit to the H. F. DuPont Winterthur Museum to examine the extensive collection of Pennsylvania German furnishings, to discuss the project with their staff, and to explore the "Decorative Arts Photographic Collection."

The research disclosed the names of ten Westminster residents who could be considered contemporaries of Jacob Sherman. Approximately fifty percent were of German descent; the remaining men were of English descent. Those of German descent included Thomas Adelsperger, David Fisher, Andrew Reese, Jacob Utz and Ludwig Wapler.

Jacob Sherman and his fellow residents of German descent had remarkably similar life experiences. All had been born at about the same time and were sons of German immigrant parents. All had owned rural farms and had later acquired a town property. In addition to farming, all had also practiced a trade or craft.

Their personal property inventories show entries for furnishings at their town and country properties and also furnishings supplied for servants. Their inventories show that they maintained some distinctively Germanic traditions, but also that they were adopting English, or more accurately American, ways.

These inventories provide an excellent source of comparative data for interpreting Jacob Sherman's inventory and for revealing the lives of Westminster residents at the turn of the nineteenth century. For example, the appraisers lumped all of Sherman's kitchen furniture and wearing apparel into two entries without listing each item individually. The comparative

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inventories list these items individually and provide a reference for furnishing these artifacts in the Sherman-Fisher-Shellman House.

This body of research has provided the basis for the furnishings and interpretation plan at the Sherman-Fisher-Shellman House. Based on this research, we have compiled a list of items needed as donations to the collection to accurately complete the period rooms. We invite you to visit the Sherman-Fisher-Shellman House over the summer as we continue our work to make the house museum truly reflect the heritage of Carroll County

*Photo credit: Courtesy of the Historical Society of Carroll County*

*Photo caption: This 1930s photograph shows the original dining room at the Sherman-Fisher-Shellman House as it was furnished by the Shellman family for a Victorian parlor.*