

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

Carroll's Yesteryears
15 September 1991

Researching B's Coffee Shoppe
by Joe Getty

Researching the early history of a Carroll County building can be a challenging project. We frequently get requests for assistance in determining the historical background and age of a structure.

Recently we received a request by Tom Beyard, director of planning for the City of Westminster. He asked that the historical society staff review the historical documentation existing for the two-story building on Liberty Street that formerly housed B's Coffee Shoppe and Dining Room.

The oral tradition of the structure is generally outlined in Christopher Weeks' "The Building of Westminster," an architectural history published in 1978. This reference cites earlier sources including a short history of the B.F. Shriver Company. These histories state that the building was built about 1881 by the B.F. Shriver Company. The cannery bought the Liberty Street parcel of land in that year to enlarge their Union Mills canning operation with a location in Westminster.

There is also a reference in the Weeks' survey file folder to the structure being built by Adam Rickell, a local stone mason and taffy maker. The B.F. Shriver Company was a major business enterprise involved in the growing and canning of agricultural products in the Westminster region. Company operations continued at the old stone house until the early 1900s.

These sources appeared to be well-founded so we began our review by researching the 1881 newspapers for references to the construction of the stone building. Late 19th century local newspapers contain many references about new construction in the community. Our library volunteer, Worth Bateman, looked through all of the 1881 editions of the *American Sentinel*, a newspaper published in Westminster. The local items in the newspapers contained a number of citations for buildings being built in the area of Liberty Street as well as throughout the town, but there was no reference to the B.F. Shriver Company constructing a new building.

We then looked at 19th century maps that are another standard resource for architecture and history in Carroll County. The map of Westminster in "An Illustrated Atlas of Carroll County, Maryland" published in 1877 by Lake, Griffin and Stevenson of Philadelphia showed a building fronting on Liberty Street that appears to be the stone building there today. The site was identified as a foundry. However, the Westminster map on the "Martenet's Map of Carroll County, Maryland" published in 1862 showed no improvements along Liberty Street. Thus we

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

have established through the maps an initial date range for construction of the building between 1862 and 1877, which brings into question the oral tradition of an 1881 date.

In order to determine the owners of the property before the B.F. Shriver Company, we prepared a chain-of-title in the land records, researching the deeds back to a plat laying out 12 lots along Liberty Street in 1864. The land records indicated that the property where the stone building stands today included lots 1, 2 and 3 of the "Mathias Addition" to Westminster. These lots were laid out by John T. Mathias, surviving executor of the estate of Jacob Mathias. The plot, surveyed by William A. Wampler and dated October 1864, is recorded in the Register of Wills office, Sales of Real Estate, Liber 2, Folio 192.

George W. Matthews and Elijah Wagoner purchased lots 1, 2 and 3 during the course of three transactions in 1865-66. Elijah Wagoner bought lot 2 from John T. Mathias on October 10, 1865, for \$605 (Carroll County Land Records, 32/439). On the same day, George W. Matthews bought lot 3 from John T. Mathias for \$350 (Carroll County Land Records, 32/442). On January 2, 1866, Wagoner and Matthews jointly purchased lot 1 for \$612 from Francis Butler who had originally purchased it from the Mathias estate (Carroll County Land Records, 32/454).

The plot does not indicate that there were any improvements on the lots at this time. The sale prices for the lots are consistent with unimproved lots at that time, although the variation in price may indicate minor improvements. It might also indicate the additional value of the corner lot because of its more attractive location.

The November 29, 1866, edition of the *American Sentinel* carried an advertisement for the Wagoner and Matthews Foundry and Machine Shops. The advertisement indicates that this business was well established by this time for the production of metal tools and equipment.

This advertisement, which ran for six months in the *American Sentinel* reads as follows:

"LOOK HERE, the undersigned having completed their NEW FOUNDRY AND MACHINE SHOPS near the Railroad Station in Westminster, would respectfully inform the public that they are now prepared to furnish STOVES, Blacksmith Toe Irons, Tire Benders, Hollow Anvils, Bakeoven Doors and Hearth Plates, Cellar Window Grates, Porch Post Irons and Casting in general, Corn and Cob Crushers, Corn Shellers, Circular Saws with benches complete for sawing firewood, etc., Horse Powers and THRESHING MACHINES, Cutting Boxes and Plows of different kinds. But would call attention to their justly celebrated 3 horse plow commonly called the PRICE PLOW. Also their well-known and unsurpassing GRAIN DRILL for sowing all

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

matter of Grain including Oats. Repairing of all kinds of attended to promptly at liberal rates. Having First Class Mechanics employed will guarantee satisfaction. Wagner and Matthews."

Typically a foundry needed a fireproof building for its operations. It is likely that the stone building on Liberty Street was built in 1865-66 for Wagoner and Matthews business. Next week's column will describe the history of the foundry operations that we have been able to uncover through our research.

Photo credit: Courtesy of Historical Society of Carroll County

Photo caption: Research has shown that this stone building on Liberty Street in Westminster was the metal foundry and machine shop of Elijah Wagoner.