

"Carroll County in 1853"

Carroll County Times article for 12 April 1998

By Jay A. Graybeal

As tax time approaches, it may be interesting to look at how local government spent tax dollars nearly a century and a half ago. In 1953 Walter V. Bennett, president of the Board of County Commissioners, presented an entertaining lecture about Carroll County in 1853 to the members of the Historical Society. His talk was summarized in an April 14, 1953 article in the Hanover Evening Sun newspaper:

"Slaves, Silver Plate Taxed In Carroll County In 1853

While most Marylanders were concerned with 1953 taxes on income, gasoline, cigarettes and other purchases last week, the Historical Society of Carroll County was engrossed in a report of 100 years ago which listed taxes on slaves, silver plate, jewelry and other personal belongings.

The county historians were entertained at their Thursday meeting in the court house at Westminster by an account of 1853 conditions reported by Walter V. Bennett, president of the Board of County Commissioners. Bennett had just completed research which will be of considerable value to the society in its history of the country.

He told of the formation of Middleburg District in 1853 as one of 10 districts in the county. He said that the largest political body seemed to be the 143 supervisors of roads. Today, with 850 miles of country roads, there are only 33 men charged with official duties of that nature.

Slaves In Freedom District

The population of Carroll County in 1853 was 16,000 and Westminster, 1,400. There were 853 slaves with 379 in Freedom District.

County officers were: James Crouse, Thomas Smith, George Little, Jacob Wickert, Julius Berrett, Georg Crouse, Jacob Grove, George Richards, Jr. and Burnett Spurrier, commissioners; Elijah F. Crout, counsel; Jacob Myerly, clerk to commissioners; William Brown, sheriff; D. S. Hoover, state's attorney; John B. Boyle, clerk of court; George Manro, Levi Buffington and Michael Sullivan, judges of Orphans' Court and John Malhorn, almshouse steward.

Budget Was \$19,019.57

The 1853 budget for Carroll County was \$19,019.57. That figure included: \$3,062 for supervisors of roads; \$1,052.07 for county commissioners; \$254 election expenses; \$166.86 for sheriff; \$56 for wood; \$343.78 for jail expenses and \$1,530.30 for roads and bridges among numerous other miscellaneous items.

There were no public schools in Carroll county in 1853, although the budget called for \$9,000 for educational purposes. Now the county allots nearly \$2,000,000 for one year's educational costs.

McKalep Had Most Land

The largest landowner 100 years ago was John McKalep in District 1, Taneytown. Freedom District boasted of its rich landowner George Patterson, Baltimore merchant, whose daughter Betsy married

Jerome Bonaparte in an elopement from their Baltimore home. McKalep owned 2,500 acres and Patterson, 1710 acres with 33 slaves.

Other big landowners were: Abraham Null, 350 acres and Basil Crabster, 540 acres in District 1; James C. Atlee, 410 acres and William Roberts, 642 acres in District 2; David Feeser, 676 acres and Catharine Groff, 396 acres in District 3; George and Richard Jacobs, 2,319 acres and 18 slaves in District 4; Richard Richards, 471 acres in District 8; Hannah Engle, 252 acres and 14 slaves and Cornelius Grimes, 744 acres in District 9; and John Waybright, 421 acres in District 10.

Key Estate Listed

Large landowners in Westminster 100 years ago were Peter Royer, 400 acres and David Roop, 486 acres. The name of Francis S. Key was listed with 500 acres at Terra Ruba, the home of Francis Scott Key, who wrote "The Star Spangled Banner."

Salem Lodge 60, IOOF elected its 1853 officers for six months. Joseph Mathias was noble grand and Joseph Shaeffer, vice grand. Other officers were Ira E. Crouse, William Reese, F. A. Sharrer, George E. Wampler, William Shreeve, Michael Baughman and Joshua Yingling. There were 300 members of the lodge.

'Lungs Like Locomotive'

In an advertisement appearing that year, Nicholas Shafer, Westminster auctioneer, "Offers his services to the people of Carroll County in the capacity of an auctioneer and respectfully solicits their favors. Having lungs like a locomotive, a voice that may be compared to Niagara's roar, and being brimful of fun, he is confident that entire satisfaction will be rendered all who may employ him."

That same year a clergy man at an afternoon service was asked to read a notice for a women's rights lecture. His statement was; "At half past, six o'clock, at the school house in the first district, a hen will attempt to crow."

Except for the number of commissioners (one for each election district) and the position of Alms House Steward, county government of 1853 was quite similar to our current form of government.

Photo caption: John Brooke Boyle was clerk of the county court in 1853. The Carroll County budget in that year was about \$19,000. Historical Society of Carroll County collection.