

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

"New Windsor Inventor"

Carroll County Times article for 6 February 1994

By Joe Getty

Several times a year, my father would have a recurring dream that he enjoyed describing to me. In the dream, he could fly, and he always flew over the town of New Windsor and saw the town, houses and people of his childhood. One fascinating aspect of his dream was the fact that he would recognize faces of people that he had not seen or thought about in 30 or 40 years.

As a boy, he worked on my grandfather's milk wagon delivering dairy products to the houses in New Windsor every morning. From this childhood job, he knew the town's streets and alleys as well as the people and their early morning habits. He always enjoyed reminiscing about the small-town life of New Windsor.

Many of his reminiscences came to mind when I attended the January 25th gala celebration of the 150th anniversary of the incorporation of the Town of New Windsor. The celebration was cosponsored by the Town of New Windsor and the New Windsor Heritage Committee.

Congratulations go to the planning committee for this event, the Mayor and Town Council of New Windsor, and the officers and members of the Heritage Committee. Among the many talented volunteers who assisted were Micki Smith, Sharon Schuster, Rachael Taggart, Lester and Shane White, Joan Hess, Richard Warehime, David Duree, Julia Cairns, Leonora Pisano, Lori and Les Douglas, Charles Acker, and Rebecca Harman.

The evening's festivities were introduced by Doris Pierce who spoke fondly about the adjustments her family had to make when they moved to New Windsor because of the townpeople's custom of referring to everyone by a nickname. "Tudor" Fritz, "Nookie" Condon, "Happy" Fritz, "Dutch" Lovell, and "Gus" Fritz were just a few of the nicknames mentioned. As she spoke, many people in the audience shouted out their favorite nickname once used by someone in town. The use of nicknames made it particularly hard for town natives and newcomers alike to look up somebody in the phone book. The nicknames were so prevalent that the given names were utterly forgotten.

New Windsor's use of nicknames was also a favorite topic of my father's reminiscences. In the early 20th century, practically every resident was known by their nickname. "Ding" Carbaugh was the town blacksmith. "Bally" Bangs was the tinsmith. "Mister Lou" Dielman was the pharmacist. "Shad" Haines was the town handyman. "Spiegel" Benedict was an outstanding basketball player for New Windsor High School and Blue Ridge College. My father always enjoyed visits with "Howdy" Roop at Roop's Grocery. The females of town had equal rights in the nicknames department: "Bessie" Roop worked in Roop's Store; "Muss" Smelser was active in the Methodist Church; "Jennie" Gates made the best custards for the church socials; and "Katy" Fissel was a flamboyant teacher in town.

When I first started researching local history, "Punkie" Barnes shared with me a set of town histories from northwestern Carroll County communities that were published during the 1890s in the Taneytown newspaper, The Carroll Record. A "History of New Windsor" written by Frank Devilbiss in one of the community histories included in this series. As our 1994 publication project, the Historical Society is planning to publish these histories which have never been published in book form.

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In honor of New Windsor's 150th anniversary, we reprint an excerpt from these histories about a New Windsor inventor known by the nickname of "Dutch John" who worked in the town machine shop:

"MACHINE SHOP - It was in the nature of Col. Atlee, a son of the founder of our town, to take great interest in the employment of laborers, and giving adequate remuneration to those deserving it, and in many instances greatly to his personal disadvantage, which, however, originated, was the establishment of a machine shop here, located where Mr. Bloom's creamery now stands. When the plant was completed, he employed a present citizen, Mr. Elijah C. Ensor, who was the first employee in the establishment.

Col. Atlee commenced the manufacture of picket fences, which was not successful; this was followed by casting stoves. Many of them were shipped to different parts of the state, but unfortunately they were nearly all returned, because the draught was imperfect. This was then abandoned for threshing machines, which met a similar fate of the ventures, and he finally sold his plant to Louis Shuey, Daniel Engel, Samuel Hoffman, Reuben Haines and Samuel Pelton, who carried it on with little better success than the originator. They built the Dorsey reaper, the first "self-rake" machine in this neighborhood, and it attracted considerable attention, besides a goodly number of buyers. Mr. Hoffman, more wise than the balance, when a large stock had been manufactured, sold out his interest to the surviving partners, and cleared himself of the foreshadowed 'elephant.'

Later on the firm employed a German named John Jann, familiarly known as "Dutch John." This fellow was a natural born genius. He invented a mower known as the "Iron Clad." which possessed considerable merit. This mower sold rapidly, was satisfactory, and made them money, but it was finally infringed upon, and "Dutch John" was deprived of his just reward. John afterward turned his attention to the manufacture of a non-explosive illuminating oil, which progressed favorably, until on one occasion he was testing its transcendent qualities before a customer named McAllister. Unexpectedly and suddenly there was an explosion of both oil and ideas, and the loss of a healthy stand of whiskers nourished by John.

Prior to this discouraging episode, he had sold several county rights of the alleged non-explosive illuminant in Pennsylvania. In one instance he bartered the rights for a small steamboat which had plied on the bosom of the Susquehanna, and so elated was he over this transaction that he celebrated the good fortune by a complete saturation of "balloon-juice" in Harrisburg. During this melee, John's steam boat was seized by river pirates, who divested it of every thing movable excepting one article, which he brought home with him, that was the ship's gong, which was sold to Mr. Louis Dielman. It has been in use ever since to summons his hostler.

Finally poor John's mechanical genius, (and this he had in a degree) weakened, and his mind became unbalanced. His final act was an attempt to produce perpetual motion, and it was a beautiful attempt. He produced an exquisite piece of workmanship of the most intricate and ingenious order, made entirely of polished brass, which was for some time on exhibition in Westminster. I remember seeing it, and hearing him explain its most intricate workings, in a highly confident and enthusiastic manner. But with all his divinations, the breath of a self-sustaining force was never breathed into it, and failure was stamped upon it and its ingenious author. He soon afterwards succumbed to "John Barleycorn", and was no more.

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The machine shop not proving successful, was abandoned. It passed through several hands in after years, but all met the same fate. The last attempt to revive it, was made by Peter Engel & Co., but it continued to play a losing game until the stakes were all lost, and the doors were closed and locked. In 1890, after tens of thousands of dollars had been sunk there, it was purchased by A. W. Bloom and converted into a creamery and ice cream manufactory, and to this date has been running successfully.

The Historical Society is publishing "The Carroll Record Histories of Northwestern Carroll County Communities" during 1994. The book will include a supplement of family, business and organizational histories prepared by donors to theispublication project. If you would like additional information about this project, contact the Historical Society at (410) 848-6494.

Cutline: New Windsor's "Dutch John" once received a steam boat in return for bartering the rights to one of his inventions. Unfortunately, the boat sank and the only thing he could salvage from it was this ship's gong which was used for many years at the Dielman Inn in New Windsor. Photo courtesy of Julia Roop Cairns.