

"County's black heritage records valuable"  
Carroll County Times Article for 11 February 1996  
By Duane K. Doxzen

On March 22, 1867 the Maryland General Assembly passed an act to record the number of slaves who had been emancipated by the Constitution of 1864. The purpose of this act was to gather evidence to support the claims of the state's former slave owners who felt compensation was due them from the Federal government for the loss of their slaves following the Civil War. While the usefulness of such an act was tenuous even at its inception, it represented futility by the time evidence was collected in Carroll County in early 1869.

Slavery had been abolished in Maryland for almost five years and in 1868 the fourteenth amendment to the U.S. Constitution had been adopted which specifically disallowed any compensation and nullified and made void any previous laws, promises or claims for compensation from the U.S. and state governments to former slave owners for the loss of their slaves. Some countians supported the state's attempt at compensation regardless and many former slave owners came forward and added their names into evidence. Others, however, regarded this collection of information with skepticism and outrage. W.L.W. Seabrook reflected this opinion in the following excerpt from his editorial from the March 18, 1869 edition of Westminster's American Sentinel:

If both the United States and the State of Maryland are prohibited from paying any claim for any slave, why go to so much trouble to perpetuate the evidence of such claims? Is it in the hope that the United States will relent and make good the losses of the slave owners who as a class were responsible for the rebellion which has cost the nation four thousand millions of dollars and five hundred thousand lives?...Or is it simply a useless ceremony, having for its object the placing of a few dollars in the pocket of some party pensioner?...While the General Assembly cannot directly appropriate any money to pay for emancipated slaves, they have unlimited power to spend the State's money in prosecuting the alleged claim against the United States.---They may fee lobbyists and lawyers, give wine and terrapin suppers, subsidize some great men like R.J. Walker and obtain his influences in favor of the claim, and in fact use any of the thousand and one ways by which money can be made to accomplish an otherwise unattainable object. We are forced to conclude that the Registration of emancipated slaves and the perpetuation of the evidence that they have been held to service and by whom they have been so held, is either altogether an unmeaning farce, or is intended to be used... in the manner suggested above. The whole thing has a suspicious look and ought to be carefully watched by the people.

It was in this climate of controversy that Carroll County's appointed Commissioner of slave statistics Lewis Welsh collected evidence for the state. While the reasons for the creation of these records may be offensive to us today, the records themselves nonetheless afford researchers with valuable information regarding this county's black heritage. The information included in this Tabular Statement of Ownership of Certain Slaves includes the names of former slave owners; the names, number, age, sex and physical condition of their slaves; the term of service for these slaves (usually life); whether such slaves were enlisted or drafted into military service; and what compensation, if any, was received from the State or Federal government for slaves enlisted or drafted. The original records are housed in the office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court in Westminster. Copies of these records are part of the collection of the Historical Society of Carroll County.

Photo Caption: None

Side Bar:

Each year the Society hosts an African-American History Forum during Black History Month. This year's program will be held at 7:30 p. m. on Thursday, February 29th, in the Shriver-Weybright Auditorium, 210 E. Main St., Westminster. Our guest speaker will be Duane Doxzen, who will present a program on local history sources for researching African-American history in Carroll County. Mr. Doxzen is a 1994 graduate of Western Maryland College and a Society volunteer who has been researching and preparing a manuscript on this topic for nearly a year. His presentation will focus on the use of a variety of public records including, wills, estate inventories, chattel records, marriage licenses, census and military records, in the process research. He will also summarize the use of other sources including newspapers, church and cemetery records. The program is free to the membership and general public.