

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

Carroll's Yesteryears
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Residents present 'everyday histories'
By Joe Getty

Last month I had the opportunity to speak at the annual meeting of the Carroll County Extension Homemakers Clubs. In preparing for this presentation, I reviewed the *Carroll Record Histories* for references relating to women's history in Carroll County.

The *Carroll Record Histories* is a series of community histories written in the 1890s that will be compiled by the Historical Society of Carroll County for the first time in a book format. The book will include a 1994 historical supplement of family, business and organizational histories compiled by donors to the publication project. If you are interested in participating in this project, please contact the Historical Society at 848-6494.

One unique element of the *Carroll Record Histories* is the anecdotal content of the writing. Long-time residents of the towns and villages in the northwestern portion of Carroll County wrote reminiscences about growing up in the community and the historical stories told to them by earlier generations. Therefore, the focus is "everyday history," which provides insights about how people, like you and me, spent their typical days over 100 years ago.

Samuel Weybright author of the "History of the Middleburg District," provided several anecdotes about women in the community. Weybright was the son of John Weybright and was born in the Middleburg vicinity on November 26, 1837. On February 11, 1862, he married Mary Ann Snader, a first cousin to the renown American sculptor William Henry Rinehart. Weybright was active in the church and community affairs until his death on November 26, 1915.

In reminiscing about early artifacts that were no longer in use in the 1890s, Weybright comments on the scrub broom and the Dutch oven in this excerpt:

"If the farmer possessed a team, plow, harrow and wagon, he was ready to farm, with what the wife brought, usually, cows, riding horse and addle, spinning wheel and scrub broom. Well, what was a scrub broom? When we were about four years old, we wandered off over the snow banks up one and down the other, until we got to the woods, and here we found some we were acquainted with: Angel's – but not the celestial kind. They would select a small choice sapling from four to six inches in diameter and take a cut about five feet long.

"The bark was taken off, splits were drawn down about a foot in length over the larger end, until the handle was about one inch or so in diameter. The splits were tied down, the handle dressed

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off and the broom complete, ready to be used in scrubbing the kitchen, as carpets then were little used.

"The broom stick has always been considered women's chief weapon of defense; we pity the poor erring man, chastised by the good wife when she had one of these weapons at her command. As the Yule-tide draws near, we are reminded of an Xmas dinner with Benjamin Poole, in the long ago, when he lived with his grandmother, Katy Biggs, widow of William. It was one of the dinners that were cooked in the Dutch oven in the large fireplace. It was the manner of preparing roasts and baked pies, in one of these vessels, placed over hot coals and coals on the lid. You may talk of your fine roasting pans but none can get up a more savory meal that one of the old 'Aunty' slaves, used to prepare in the old way."

While we consider the advances of technology in the 20th century, it is interesting to observe the nostalgia for the old days as expressed by a writer in the 1890s, 100 years ago. In addition to their work in the household, women also helped out in the fields, and probably not enough attention is given in local history studies to this role of women. An excerpt from J.W. Reck's "History of Harney" provides an illustration:

"During this period, all of the grain was cut with the cradle, and it was customary for nearly all of the women to help in gathering the harvest; some raked, while others would bind, but as a general thing the women done all the raking, and we are told that the Eckes girls were considered very good hands. One harvest while John Hess was cutting grain on the farm now owned by Frank Null, one of the girls raked after him, and she raked up so close to him that in finishing up her sheaf she would always take the last cut as it would drop from the cradle. Mr. Hess was afraid of cutting her and told her several times to stay back, but she kept no account of his warning, but rather kept getting closer and closer, until the point of the cradle scythe cut her apron string in two and it dropped down on the ground; this frightened both Mr. Hess and the girl, and after this narrow escape she could keep back far enough to be out of danger."

While we do not generally think of women as having been active in the business community during the 19th century, there were some women who participated in the commercial affairs of their towns. Frank Devilbiss in his "History of New Windsor" describes the business and community roles of Catherine Brawner. In 1841, she was the only woman on the Board of Directors of the New Windsor Library Company, which was incorporated by the state legislature in January of that year. As early as 1825, she had opened a female academy in New Windsor and Devilbiss states: "Her efficiency as a teacher became recognized, and the young from far and near all attended Miss Brawner's school. For many years she very successfully conducted this school which gained in influence and members until the support grew in the community to establish a college."

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With regard to her business acumen, she also served for the longest period of time as the postmaster of New Windsor, from 1828, to 1844. Devilbiss, writing in 1895, states "It will be noted that Catherine M. Brawner served the longest term in office – 19 years. This looks as if Andromaniacs existed at that early day and that business efficiency in women is not confined to the present era of her struggling ambition in business and bicycling."

In the context of the Victorian male stereotypes of the late 19th century, it is apparent that Devilbiss was paying a sincere tribute to Mrs. Brawner. The *Carroll Record Histories* contain other examples of women's contributions throughout our history. Women are listed as educators, musicians, poets, writers and artists. In fact, women are frequently listed as historians, the male writers in the series frequently have to give credit to a woman in the community who was locally recognized as the town historian. The anecdotal quality of these community histories provides a fascinating perspective about Carroll County's heritage.

The Historical Society is publishing "The Carroll Record Histories of Northwestern Carroll County Communities" in the fall of 1994. The book will include a supplement of family, business and organizational histories prepared by donors to this publication project. A pre-publication sale is also being conducted until June 30. If you would like additional information about this project, call the Historical Society at 848-6494.