

## "Historical Society Founded in 1939"

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By Jay A. Graybeal

Sixty years ago a small but dedicated group of local citizens met to organize a historical society. At that time the only organization with more than a passing interest in the county's history was the Carroll County Society of Baltimore which held an annual dinner on the county's birthday, January 19th. A March 17, 1939 article about the new society appeared in the local press:

### "A CARROLL COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

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Launched at a Westminster Meeting last Saturday.

Notwithstanding the disagreeable weather, the meeting called for the purpose of organizing a Carroll Historical Society, last Saturday afternoon, was attended by about sixty persons, mainly from Westminster and vicinity. Former State Senator, J. David Baile was named temporary president, and Mrs. Charles O. Clemson, Secretary. Rev. Miles S. Reifsnyder delivered an invocation. The following were among those who spoke favoring the project: Mr. Baile, George R. Babylon, secretary of the Carroll County Society of Baltimore; Senator A. Earl Shipley; Stanford Hoff, Member House of Delegates; J. Walter Eckenrode, H. Peyton Gorsuch, Norman R. Hess, County Commissioner; Miss Elizabeth Billingslea, Raymond A. Hyson, Superintendent of Schools, and Maj. T. M. Shepard, member of the Nebraska Historical Society. The following named were chosen as officers: J. David Baile, President; Charles W. Melville, [Test Kimmey], and Arthur G. Tracey, Vice-Presidents; Mrs. Chas. O. Clemson, Secretary, and Mrs. Carroll Shunk, Treasurer. Following discussion it was decided to fix the membership fee at \$1.00 and that all 1939 members be designated "charter" members. There will be a Board of Directors and various committees named later, and in due time the objects of the Society will be more definitely prosecuted. The Maryland Historical Society, the Peabody Institute and the Enoch Pratt Library have already secured considerable information concerning the County, while Scharff's History of Maryland (2 Vols.) published in 1882 is a mine of information both before and since its formation in 1837. The files of the county weeklies also contain valuable data for research work. The new Society, therefore, will be limited only by the extent of its efforts toward compiling extensive history of the county; but a great deal of hard work, ability and time, as well as extensive financing, will be required to bring into materialization a really valuable final result."

The early meetings of the Society were often held in a member's home and featured guest speakers on a variety of local history topics. The May 1939 meeting was described in the May 9th issue of this newspaper:

### "CARROLL HISTORICAL GROUP HOLDS MEETING

One of the most delightful and instructive meetings yet held by the groups interested in the Historical Society of Carroll County was that called by Mrs. M. John Lynch, chairman of the History Committee, for Sunday afternoon at her home on East Main street. Mrs. Lynch, who may have inherited her interest in history from her distinguished ancestor, Gen. Mordecai Gist, who made history during the Revolutionary War, had arranged a well planned program and opened the meeting by calling on Mrs. H. M. Kimmey to lead in the singing of "The Star Spangled Banner", by calling on Michael E. Walsh, a member of her committee who read George Washington's prayer for his country. Col. T. K. Harrison read a poem written by Harry J. Shellman in 1887, called "Fifty Years of Carroll," which is most illuminating. Miss Carrie Mourer next read "One Hundred Years of Carroll," by Folger McKenzie, the Bentztown Bard. J. David

Baile, president of the Society, told of the granting of permission by the County Commissioners of Carroll County and by Chief Judge F. Neal Parke, to store valuable documents in the Court House until a permanent home is secured. Mrs. Harry M. Kimmey and J. Walter Eckenrode, former president of the Carroll County Society of Baltimore City, both stressed the importance of securing this home as soon as possible. Mrs. W. Carroll Shunk, treasurer, reported that seventeen permanent home memberships had been received; seven life memberships, and 183 annual memberships have been received. An objective of the historical committee was decided upon as the aim to "discover, collect, and preserve all historical data relative to the settlement, growth and development of Carroll County, before and after its foundation, to include civic, church and family history." This was proposed by Col. Harrison. While there are no startling historical events during the past hundred years in the territory within the confines of this county, there are countless events and happenings in the life of its people that are vitally interesting to those living in this beautiful land. Mrs. Frank Z. Miller, whose father, Mr. Joshua Hering, was lovingly called 'The Grand Old Man of Carroll,' has offered to the society an interesting book about the county as soon as a proper place for keeping important documents has been obtained." From these modest beginnings, the Historical Society of Carroll County has become a county wide organization with a large membership, extensive collections, three historic properties, diverse public programming and a local history publications program. Much of the success is directly due to the efforts of the early members who had the vision and the willingness to donate their time and resources.

Photo caption: Newly elected Board Members of the Historical Society of Carroll County were photographed by John Byers in 1939. Left to right: Mrs. Irene Shunk, Treasurer; Mary Clemson, Secretary; Mrs. Test Kimmey, Vice-President; Dr. Arthur Tracey, Vice-President and J. David Baile, President. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert McKinney, 1980.