

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

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24 November 1991

Medals honored 1916 border guard
by Jay Graybeal

Seventy-five years ago 106 local Maryland National Guardsmen returned home after spending nearly five months guarding the Mexican border. While the soldiers stood guard on the border, local citizens took care of their families.

A group of local citizens met on June 22, the day after the departure of Co. H and the Band, to plan an organization to be known as the Carroll County Associators. The main purpose of the Associators was to look after the needs of the local soldiers' dependents. A public meeting held on June 28 in the Westminster Opera house resulted in the unanimous vote for the new organization. The officers were J. Milton Reifsnider, president, Joseph N. Shriver, treasurer and H. Peyton Gorsuch, secretary.

The most pressing need of soldier dependents was supplemental income since military pay was not always equal to civilian wages. Seven committees were formed to investigate individual cases of need for consideration by the Associators. Committeeman Dr. Charles R. Foutz reported on the typical circumstances of a soldier's wife with two children. "Has some smoked meat, potatoes new in garden and some lard, uses coal oil for cooking, buys sugar, flour, coffee, etc. in small quantities and does not have any ready money." The Associators voted to pay the wife \$5 per week to help make ends meet. Similar payments to other families totaled about \$250 per month, an amount raised by popular subscription throughout the county.

Once it was learned that the guardsmen would soon return home, the Associators discussed suitable tribute for the soldiers. After some debate, the group decided to present a bronze medal to each Border Service veteran on Thanksgiving Day, 1916.

The *Times* carried a lengthy front-page story of the event:

"Yesterday afternoon an event that will long be remembered by all who witnessed it, took place at the Opera House, when the citizens presented to each member of the First Regiment Band and Company H of the 1st Maryland Infantry, a handsome bronze medal as a testimonial of appreciation for services rendered on the Mexican border.

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

"Promptly at 2:30 p.m., the parade left the Armory, lead by Chief Stem and Wm. Helm of the Police force; the First Regiment Band and Company H followed by Chief Marshal Jas. Beacham, Jr., and his aides, August Humbert, Grier Robertson and John Baker, and the Westminster Fire Company carrying a large American flag. The Fire Co. acted as an escort when the 'boys' left in June and returned in November and it was gratifying to have them take part in the parade yesterday.

"The route of the parade was Armory to Center St., to Green, to Washington Ave., to Union, to Main, to Chautauqua Grounds, where a large crowd had assembled to witness a Dress Parade given by Co. H. From this point the parade moved to Bond St., to Main to the Opera House, where an interesting program had been arranged in connection with the presentation of the medals. The Band and Co. formed on the stage standing while a number of the Carroll County Associators occupied seats on the stage. After a selection by the Band, the secretary of the Associators read letters of regret at not being able to be present and words of commendation for the Co. and Band from Chas. A. Little, Colonel Commanding 1st Md. Regiment and M.A. Reckord, Major of the Battalion to which Co. H belonged. These letters are published in another column of the Times.

"Rev. E.T. Read in a pleasing and appropriate address, presented he Band and Company to the Chairman of the Carroll County Associators, J. Milton Reifsnider, Esq., who in response spoke of the appreciation of our citizens for the services rendered and record made by the men on the Mexican border and stated he deemed it a great honor as a representative of the citizens of Westminster and Carroll Co. to have the privilege of presenting this lasting testimonial to the soldiers and members of the Band.

"The Secretary then called the roster of the Band and Co. H and as each man's name was called, he walked to the front of the stage, amidst applause and received his medal. Captain Weigle on behalf of the Company and Band accepted the medals and spoke of the splendid discipline and record made by the Carroll County boys.

"The Captain then gave the order to pin on the medals after which the Band played the Star Spangled Banner. The program was concluded by a prayer and the benediction by Rev. E.T. Read.

"Every seat in the Opera House was filled and many standing. The seats reserved for the families of members of the Company and Band were all occupied and a feature that added to the occasion

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

was the small children of the men with their banner and flags in charge of Miss Mary B. Shellman, and none were happier or enjoyed the exercises more than they.

"The medals were made to order by the Whitehead & Hoag Co., of Newark, N.J. From a special design decided upon by the committee and are of solid bronze on the face of which is the American Eagle, surrounded by a circle with the words United States National Guards and on the reverse the rank and name of the recipient, hand engraved and the inscription 'Presented by the citizens of Westminster as a testimonial of Appreciation for services rendered on the Mexican border 1916.' They are suspended from a bar with the inscription Co. H., 1st Md. Infantry, and 1st Regiment Band, Md. N. G., respectively.

"The medals are a lasting testimonial and will be prized more and more not only by the men but by their children and children's children. It is proposed in addition to this individual testimonial to provide one for the Co. and Band as organizations and the committee have under consideration a bronze tablet to be placed in the new Armory with proper inscriptions and the name of the men upon it."

The veterans' homecoming was brief. Their return from the border was due to easing tensions with Mexico but also worsening relations with Germany. By the time America declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917, many of the guardsmen were already in active service.

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Historical Society of Carroll County

Photo caption: Bronze medal presented to members of Co. H and the Regimental Band, Thanksgiving Day, 1916. Left: front of medal presented to Band Sgt. Uriah G. Heltebridle. Right: Reverse of medal presented to 1st Sgt. Drum Major Harry M. Kimmey.