

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

"Westminster in the 1880s"

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by Jay A. Graybeal

One of the earliest landscape photographs of Westminster was taken from College Hill in 1869. The unknown photographer recorded an impressive view that captured not only the prominent structures but also the back lots, gardens and fences of modest homes on Union Street. Clearly visible in the foreground is Union Street Methodist Church built in 1867. Also visible in the upper left is the original Grace Lutheran Church on Carroll Street, destroyed in the Great Fire of Westminster in 1883. Directly opposite is the nearly completed St. Paul's United Church of Christ on Green Street completed in 1870. Workmen are preparing to erect the Gothic steeple which was destroyed by a tornado in 1893.

At the time this photograph was taken, Westminster was experiencing a period of growth. The town had witnessed the coming of the railroad in 1862 and several new areas were being developed. Growth, and a desire for more, led to the publication of the city's first directory on January 1, 1889. Published by Vanderford Bros., publishers of the Democratic Advocate newspaper, the book included a brief history on Westminster which read, in part:

From a straggling town, of unprepossessing appearance, twenty years ago, it has grown to be an attractive little city, with some of the finest business houses and handsomest residences to be seen out of the large cities, while no place, perhaps, with a like population, can boast of so many and so beautiful churches. Her educational advantages embrace a Theological Seminary, A College and Public and Private Schools. A railroad affords frequent and rapid communication with Baltimore and other places, and the telegraph and telephone, and excellent mail facilities, are other advantages possessed by the city. The place has an abundant supply of pure water, so essential to health, so necessary in time of fire, and so useful for manufacturing purposes. The climate, too, is unsurpassed by that of any other place. The citizens neither experience the extremes of cold in winter nor of heat in summer, the rude blasts of winter being tempered by the influence of the Gulf Stream, and its elevation rendering it pleasant in summer.

The streets are lighted by gas, and are wide and straight. they have recently been graded and the sidewalks been relaid to conform to a uniform grade. On several of the outlying streets much new paving has been done, and the work will begin anew in the spring. A proposition for paving the beds of the streets has been considered for some time, and the Mayor and Common Council, by a vote of the people, are authorized to have the work done when a suitable plan is decided upon.

The county tax rate is fifty cents on the \$100, the lowest of any county in the State, and the municipal rate is but twenty cents on the \$100, five of which are for water. The debt of the city is insignificant, being only \$2,500 on an assessable basis of \$2,000,000.

Westminster has a population of 3,000, and is steadily growing. It is favorably situated on Parr's Ridge, thirty-four miles from Baltimore by the Western Maryland Railroad, which runs through the centre of the city, and twenty-eight by turnpike.

The city is governed by a Mayor and Common Council, who are elected annually, the first Monday in May. the present officers are: Mayor, Milton Schaeffer; Common Councilmen, Charles E. Fink, George R. Gehr, Orlando Reese, Thomas R. Myer, George Stouch. The city government is non-partisan.

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AS A SUMMER RESORT

Westminster has many advantages. It is 1,000 feet above tide, its altitude giving it a pure and invigorating air, free from all malarial influences and highly promotive of health. It is also free from mosquitoes, those almost universal summer pests, so annoying to the inhabitants of the lowlands and along the water courses, to the dwellers by the sea and to the citizens of our chief cities. The surrounding country is one of surpassing loveliness, abounding in fertile valleys, and majestic hills, traversed with excellent roads leading to rural scenery that, like the ever-changing kaleidoscope, continually presents to the eye something "ever charming, ever new." Nowhere is the scenery more beautiful, the climate more healthful, or the water more pure. the drainage is perfect. On one side the water flows to the Patapsco and thence mingles with the waters of the Cheasapeake, and on the other it flows through tortuous courses into the historic Potomac. The nights are pleasant, even in the hottest weather, the temperature being modified by the breezes from the Blue Ridge Mountains that are plainly in view and form the background to the enchanting landscape on the west.

The city is well supplied with hotels, large, well-furnished and fitted up with all the modern improvements, while the rates are low as compared with those of many other places, with less attractions.

The project of putting up an exclusively summer hotel at Winchester Place, shown among the illustrations, which is about five minutes walk from the depot, has been talked of for some time past, and the matter will soon be considered seriously. The distance to Baltimore is so short and railroad communication so frequent, it is believed that a first-class hotel would be a paying investment. Winchester Place comprises ten acres, with fine shade trees, and slopes gently to Green Street, which is rapidly filling up with handsome residences. Upon this place is a fine spring, the water of which was analyzed by Prof. William e. Aiken, of the University of Maryland, Baltimore. His report, made to John C. Frizell, then owner of the place, says:

"A gallon of water contains 15.76 grains of saline matter. This quantity, taken in connection with the character of salts present, will fully entitle the water to the name of a mineral water. The contents of the water are hydrochloric acid, sulphuric acid, carbonic acid, silicic acid (a trace,) lime, magnesia, soda, iron, alumina (a trace,) organic vegetable matter. These substances, arranged in their order of the well-known combinations, may be considered as representing the following compounds, which give the mineral character and medicinal value of the water: Bicarbonate of lime, bicarbonate of magnesia, bicarbonate of iron, sulphate of lime, sulphate of soda, sulphate of magnesia, chloride of sodium, and a trace each of alumina, silicic acid, and organic vegetable matter." In a postscript Prof. Aiken, says: "the copious deposit that falls when the matter stands for a time consists almost wholly of oxide of iron."

Westminster has all the delights of the country, coupled with many of the advantages of the large cities. It is oblong in shape, and it is but a few minutes walk from any point out into the open country.

AS A PLACE OF RESIDENCE

Westminster is unsurpassed. Besides the advantages noted above, as to location, railroad, telephone, telegraph, mail facilities, water, gas, low taxes, churches and schools, the citizens are hospitable and sociable, refined and intelligent, and living is cheap. Splendid butter and rich cream and milk are supplied daily from the excellent dairies in the surrounding country; butchers furnish choice cuts from healthy beeves; bakers carry to your doors the best of bread, biscuit, rolls and cake, while market-men call daily with fruit, vegetables, fish, oysters, &c., in season. Rents are reasonable, while building lots can

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be purchased at low figures, either within the corporate limits or on the many commanding eminencies surrounding the city. Brick and lumber are at hand, and the city has a number of master builders and skilled mechanics.

The Western Maryland Railroad offers great facilities for traveling, in the summer season running as many as eight trains a day each way, or sixteen in all.

The remainder of the introductory text included a description of business activity, an inducement for settlers by the Western Maryland Railroad and a list of the various societies and organizations in Westminster. The writers closed with this description of the town. "In short, Westminster is a live town, filled with an active, industrious and thrifty population, that is unsurpassed for intelligence, skill and business energy. Altogether there is no more desirable place for business, for a comfortable, healthful and convenient permanent residence, or for the summer's sojourn, than Westminster.

Photo Caption: Westminster looking east from College Hill in 1869. This image is one of the earliest known images of the town. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of Edwin F. Shriver.