

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

"Carroll County and July 4, 1776"

Carroll County Times Article for 4 July 1995

By Jay A. Graybeal

The "Glorious Fourth" was quite dull here, during the day, but the patriotism evinced during the evening made up for the previous lack of its exhibition. The populace was out in force and enjoyed the fireworks which were displayed ..."

Manchester Correspondent

American Sentinel

July 12, 1895

The signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776 had a profound impact on the lives of the settlers who lived the area that was to become Carroll County. At that time the present day boundaries of our county were contained in Frederick and Baltimore Counties. Frederick County stretched south and west and contained the present day counties of Montgomery, Washington, Allegany and Garrett. The old dividing line between Frederick and Baltimore Counties ran northward from near Mt. Airy, through Westminster and ended at the Mason-Dixon Line north of Bachman's Valley. This boundary line would remain until the formation of Carroll County in 1837.

By the time of the Revolution there were settlers living throughout the two counties and the frontier had moved westward making the area relatively secure. Two market towns, Taneytown and Westminster, had been laid out in the northern half of the present day county and were largely inhabited by Pennsylvania German settlers. In Taneytown more than 75 lots had been sold and in Westminster an equal number had been sold by the same time. And although people were living in the areas that would become towns, only Taneytown and Westminster appear on Maryland maps as late as the 1790s. In the southern half of the county, Tidewater English settlers lived on scattered farms and did not develop market towns.

The seeds of Revolutionary sentiment were sewn with the passage of the Stamp Act in 1765, a British measure designed to recover the costs of the French and Indian War. If earlier acts which had affected New England imports and western lands had created little concern among Marylanders, the Stamp Act landed like a bombshell. Public meetings were held which denounced the act and in 1766 the Sons of Liberty form in Baltimore County. Three years later Maryland merchants adopted the nonimportation of British goods and in 1774 a Provincial Convention sends delegates to the First Continental Congress. In the same year, Baltimoreans ship corn and wheat, some of it undoubtedly grown in this area, and bread to the people of Boston. Frederick County militiamen joined Washington's army at Boston in July 1775. The Maryland Convention adopted the independence resolution on July 3, 1776 and four Marylanders signed the Declaration of Independence on the following day.

Local support for independence was strong. When the freemen of Frederick County were asked in early June 1776 to "express their sentiments on the question of independence" they unanimously resolved, "That what may be recommended by the majority of the Congress, equally delegated by the people of the United Colonies, we will, at the hazard of our lives and fortunes, support and maintain; and every resolution of the Convention tending to separate this Province from a majority of the colonies, without the consent of the people, is destructive to our internal safety and big with public ruin."

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The coming of the Revolution brought changes to Maryland society. When war with England appeared likely, Maryland called upon the male population to take up arms. The prospect of military service brought about an expectation of greater freedoms for private soldiers and humble folk who could not vote because they did not own land. The Revolutionary leaders of Maryland, however, sought to minimize change in an effort to maintain pre-war order. Maintaining control was not entirely possible as the former colonial leaders prepared to draft the first constitution. Among the 76 men elected to the convention in August 1776, were 50 who had never served in the provincial assembly. Some notable losers in the election were Charles Carroll of Carrollton, William Paca and Thomas Stone, all signers of the Declaration of Independence.

New to the legislature were men like David Shriver, Sr., of Little Pipe Creek (now known as Avondale) in what is now Carroll County. Shriver directly represented Frederick County and indirectly he voiced the concerns of the Germans of Western Maryland. Judge Abraham Shriver wrote in 1829 about the role of his father, David Shriver, Sr., during the Revolution:

"The disputes between the colonies and the Mother Country early attracted his attention, and he became an early and active and devoted Whig. So warm was he in the support of the rights of his Country, that his friends were alarmed for his safety, and his clergy emphatically warned him to beware that the powers placed over him were of God, and that he would be hung for treason, and his family made beggars. He treated the admonition with marked contempt and persevered taking an active part on committees of vigilance and public safety, and rousing his countrymen to vindicate their rights. He was in consequence elected a member of the convention of 1776 to form a constitution for the state of Maryland..."

Despite the influx of new members such as David Shriver, the new constitution was largely a conservative victory which left government in the hands of the propertied. The delegates did, however, make some substantial changes in voting rights. Men who did not own land but owned £30 in personal property were allowed to vote, a fifty percent reduction of the colonial qualification. Office seekers, however, had to be far more wealthy. To run for the lower house required a man to own £500 in real or personal property. Twice as much was required for the senate, the governor's executive council, a delegate to the Continental Congress or a sheriff. Only men worth £5,000 met the requirement for governor.

The signing of the Declaration of Independence had some immediate and lasting impacts. Royal sounding street names such as Castle Street in Manchester and King Street in Westminster became Main Streets. When Carroll County was formed in 1837, the new county was named after Charles Carroll of Carrollton, who had been the last Signer to die. During the nineteenth century, July 4th was a popular community holiday filled with parades, patriotic speeches, dinners and seemingly endless toasts. One wonders how those who attended the 1842 Westminster celebration felt the following morning after an evening of 26 toasts beginning with one for George Washington and ended with one for the "fair sex."

Photo caption: David Shriver, Sr., (1735-1826) of Little Pipe Creek who represented local residents in the 1776 Maryland Constitutional Convention. From a copy of a portrait that hangs in the Bonham House, York, Pa. Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. G. Donald Riley.