

"Carroll County Society Dinner, 1923"

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By Jay A. Graybeal

Prior to the founding of the Historical Society of Carroll County in 1939, the only organization with an interest in county history was the Carroll County Society of Baltimore. Most of the members had been born in Carroll County and they held an annual banquet on January 19th, the county birthday. Local history was the topic at the 1923 meeting and featured lectures by W.W. Husband, U. S. Commissioner General of Immigration and Joseph D. Brooks, editor of the Westminster American Sentinel newspaper. Mr. Brooks delivered a lengthy historical address which was printed in the January 26 issue of his paper:

"Mr. Toastmaster, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Carroll County Society of Baltimore: There are times when I am persuaded almost to agree with former U. S. Senator Sherman, of Illinois, who, in a public address declared that if he had it in his power he would burn all the histories, because, as he stated, they contained nothing but the history of wars and bloodshed giving the student an erroneous idea of mankind. Instead he would write a history of the advance made by man in religion, commerce, science, the professions, agriculture mechanics, the arts, etc. In what I shall say to-night I shall endeavor, in a rather crude manner to give you an idea of the character of the people who settled that part of Maryland which, since 1837, has borne the name of Carroll county. Insofar as I have been able to learn the northern and eastern part of the county were settled first. In and about the year 1670 there arrived in the northern and eastern sections of the county a people who, for the purpose of finding a land where they could worship God unmolested, and according to the dictates of their own conscience, had, at the request of William Penn, the founder of the colony of Pennsylvania, forsaken the hill country of what is now Germany, Switzerland and the Palatinate in Europe and migrated to the colony of Pennsylvania, landing in the then important town of Philadelphia, whence they journeyed westward and southward to what they supposed was the southern part of the colony of Pennsylvania. These people were the followers of Luther and Zwingli, the former the founder of the Lutheran Church and the latter the Reformed Church. they were an honest, religious, and industrious people, just the kind from which empires spring. After them came the member of the sect known as Dunkards (now called the Church of the Brethren) from Germany, and later on the Scotch-Irish Protestants, or Presbyterians from the county of Antrim in northeast Ireland. At that time the Maryland colony was governed by Lord Baltimore, a Roman Catholic, and when these people settled in what is now the northern and eastern Parts of Carroll county little did they know that in America they were placing themselves under the jurisdiction of a Catholic. That was one of the reasons they had left Europe. but when Lord Baltimore and William Penn agreed upon a compromise and settled the disputed boundary between the colonies on a certain parallel of north latitude, now known as the Mason and Dixon line, they found themselves in the colony of Maryland. From that day until very recently a large majority of these people have little or no important business or social relations with their southern or western neighbors, most of their business, except legal matters, being transacted with the people of the towns of southern Pennsylvania, especially with Hanover and Littlestown.

A Religious People

In the northern part of the county Reformed, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Catholic congregations were organized shortly after the country became sufficiently settled. Between the year 1760 and 1790 Reformed and Lutheran congregations were organized at Silver Run, Manchester and Taneytown where, shortly thereafter, church edifices were erected out of logs. Due to the scarcity of ministers of the Gospel the congregations had a very hard time to keep together, but, as usual, these difficulties were overcome eventually and today these congregations are the largest in the county and occupy handsome church

edifices. In 1760 the Presbyterians organized a small congregation at Piney Creek in Taneytown district and erected a log meeting house upon the site of the present substantial church building. In 1790 a Catholic missionary priest organized a Catholic congregation in Taneytown. The Dunkards first came to Carroll county about 1700, when Philip Englar, a then prominent elder of the church at Lancaster, Pa., came into the county and took up a large tract of land in the neighborhood of what is now Linwood and called it "Priestland." He was the common ancestor of all the Englars in our part of Maryland. Practically all of Myers, Manchester, Taneytown, New Windsor, Union Bridge, Uniontown and Middleburg districts were settled by the Germans (except those Scotch-Irish that settled in Taneytown district) and the balance of the county by Scotch, Irish and English; mostly English. To this day the line of demarcation is perceptible from one end of the county to the other, the difference in the habits, likes, and dislikes of the people of the aforementioned sections of the county being pronounced. The southern and western parts of the county were settled by English, most of whom, and perhaps all of the, were adherents of the Church of England. Up to a time within the recollection of many persons now living the greater part of the land between Westminster and the Howard county line was in heavy timber and sage grass. Until the coming of Strawbridge to Carroll county, (then Frederick county) about 1750, who was the first missionary of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, there was not a single religious congregation or church edifice in all of that territory south and west of Westminster, save and except the Chapel of Ease, now known as Old Trinity Protestant Episcopal Church, located at Eldersburg, and now abandoned and decaying. About 1740 the county south and west of Westminster began to be settled by English and their place of worship was in old St. Thomas P. E. Church, in Garrison Forest, near what is now called Owings Mills in Baltimore county. Among the names of the vestry of the church we find Peter Gosnell, who in 1745 became the first senior warden, some of whose descendants still own and occupy part of the original tract of land of 1,000 acres, near Watersville, for which he took out a patent from the Lord Proprietor of Maryland in 1735; Abel Brown, Robert Tevis, Edward Dorsey, Thomas Beasman and John Elder, all good southern Carroll names. It was a long distance (in those days) from Watersville, down through Freedom and Eldersburg and from thence across the Patapsco Falls, to old St. Thomas Episcopal Church, but up to within a short time before his death Peter Gosnell made the trip almost weekly, and, in compliance with his wish, his remains were interred in the church graveyard immediately outside the door of the church edifice. Gradually, under the leadership of Francis Asbury, a large majority of the people south and west of Westminster, and finally in Westminster town, became members of or visitors to the Methodist Church, and to-day that denomination has large congregations in that section. In a strictly agricultural community such as Carroll county the social centers of all the small neighborhoods are the churches. Around them are buried the ancestors and within their walls the present generations meet for worship, relaxation from daily toil, and social intercourse. Without the churches and schools the inhabitants of the rural districts would go back almost to primitive times. The people who settled northern and western Carroll came from Pennsylvania while those who settled the southern and western section came up from the ports of Baltimore and Annapolis. They met near Westminster. William Winchester, who in 1710 was born in London, came to Carroll county, March 6, 1729, intermarried with Lydia Richards July 22, 1747 and died in Westminster September 2, 1790 was the founder of Westminster. He came about as far north as any Englishman perhaps farther than any other."

Part II will appear next week

Photo caption: Joseph D. Brooks, Esq., editor of the American Sentinel newspaper was a guest speaker at the 1923 Carroll County Society of Baltimore banquet. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of Mrs. Roy Kindig