

"HSCC Buys Shellman House"

Carroll County Times article for 15 August 1999

By Jay A. Graybeal

The founding of the Historical Society of Carroll County in 1939 paralleled hundreds of similar institutions across the nation. Local citizens banded together to save a threatened historic structure. For Carroll countians, the structure was the Shellman House at 206 E. Main St. in Westminster. This newspaper ran a front page story about the acquisition of the property:

"MEETING OF CARROLL HISTORICAL SOCIETY"

An executive meeting of the Historical Society of Carroll County, Maryland, was held on Tuesday evening at the home of Mrs. Paul M. Wimert, 67 West Green street. There was a large attendance and the president, former State Senator, J. David Baile, presided. Charles O. Clemson acted as secretary in the absence of his wife.

The president and several of the members discussed the purchase of the Shellman house as a permanent home for the society. Col. T. K. Harrison raised the bid to \$3000 for the property and his bid was accepted at the sale held on Saturday. Details incident to needy repairs will be discussed at a later meeting. The president appointed A. Earl Shipley, Stanford Hoff and T. K. Harrison a committee to draw up constitution and by-laws to present at the next meeting which is called as an open meeting for Friday evening, August 25, at 8 o'clock in the Ascension Parish Hall on Court street. The immediate repairs for the newly acquired property will be discussed at that time. Mrs. Harry Kimmey was made temporary chairman of the house committee and was authorized to have some cleaning up done at this time.

Miss Lillian Shipley, Mrs. M. John Lynch and Miss Elizabeth Billingslea were named to serve on the nominating committee and they are to report at the next meeting.

It was unanimously decided to make every effort to raise a larger amount for the permanent home fund. Mr. Baile stated that he felt the society should acquire as much as possible toward this fund and keep the society free of debt as much as possible. Memberships and donations have been steadily coming in to the treasurer, Mrs. W. Carroll Shunk."

Two weeks later, this paper carried an update on the Society's activities and also reprinted a letter from poet Folger McKinsey, "The Bentztown Bard", praising the new society for saving the property:

"HOME OF A POET TO BECOME A COUNTY HISTORICAL SHRINE"

It was both interesting and gratifying to read in The Sun the other day that the home of the late Miss Mary Shellman in Westminster had been bought for the use of the Carroll County Historical Society and would be made a shrine for Carroll county lore and legend. Miss Mary was a part of the lore and legend of Carroll county and the poet of its supreme significance in the historical niche of the State. Her spirit will, no doubt, always be in that old house and I know of no better tribute that a community could pay to one of its gifted singers than thus to dedicate the rooms and halls where she walked to the muse of history. I think it is something she would have approved and been proud of herself in her modest way, for she had a great love for Westminster, its people and its fine historical record. The name of Shellman has meant a great deal in the annals of cultural achievement in that town, and Miss Mary Shellman's spirit will certainly be at home there still in the old home to which the muse of history has been bidden to set up her penates.—Bentztown Bard in Baltimore Sun, August 28."

Sadly, some of the initial enthusiasm for the new project was dampened by international events. The September 1st issue of this paper also carried a brief story about Hitler's invasion of Poland of the same date. In a short time, the war naturally overshadowed civic projects and resulted in restricted funds, volunteers, skilled labor and even building materials for needed renovations. Real progress in creating a county wide organization would not proceed until peace returned in 1945.

Photo caption: Members of the newly founded Historical Society posed in front of the Shellman House following its purchase in August 1939. First row, left to right: Carroll Shunk, Mrs. Annette Whitmore Smith, Miss Carrie Mourer, Dorothy Elderdice, Mrs. Bradford Gist Lynch, Frances Thompson and Mrs. Irene B. Shunk. Second row, left to right: T. K. Harrison, ----- Baile, Authur Zile, Miss Lillian Shipley and Adalaide Hoffman. Historical Society of Carroll County collection.