

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

Carroll's Yesteryears
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Sunrise service at pond began in 1955
By Joe Getty

Community traditions. The work of the Historical Society of Carroll County frequently involves documenting various community traditions. Significant elements of our heritage can be found in the customs of Carroll County's families, organizations, businesses, religious institutions and other groups.

One holiday custom that will be practiced today throughout Carroll County is the tradition of sunrise church services on Easter morning. An example is the most recent tradition that began in 1955 by the Westminster United Methodist Church to conduct a service at the community pond. The pond was a public amenity created as part of the Westminster bypass project that was completed and dedicated in 1954. The *Carroll County Times* printed a photograph of the first community pond Easter sunrise service in its edition of April 14, 1955. The photograph was taken by John R. Byers and ran with the following caption: "About 400 persons attended the first Easter Sunrise Service held at 6 a.m. at the Community Pond, Westminster, by the Youth Fellowship of the Westminster Methodist Church. Featured were the church's chapel choir, a trumpet trio of Prof. Edward Moyer, Norman Arbaugh and William E. Price, Key Club octet and address by Prof. Robert B. Pond, Johns Hopkins University. Thomas Warren presided."

A variety of community traditions from the village of Pleasant Valley was the subject of a presentation that I gave last weekend to the Pleasant Valley 4-H Club on the occasion of their 45th anniversary. This presentation included many references to a series of articles about Pleasant Valley history by Emma Myers Reed, whose father Melancton Myers ran the country store in the 1880s-90s

One of her reminiscences deals with the Pennsylvania German tradition of wheelbarrow contests: "Farmers would come to the store after their work was done to play checkers and dominos with papa. One time papa invited the men of the country-side to come on a certain Saturday for a wheelbarrow contest. Stakes were drawn around the orchard about 50 feet apart, but opposite each other. The men were blindfolded, and had to push the wheel-barrow from one stake to the other. Papa was the first contestant. The signal was given and papa started off beautifully; going toward the stake, when all of a sudden, he veered his barrow to the right. I had been so interested, and seeing the error, in my childish voice I called out, 'Oh, papa' – he straightened

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the barrow but then stopped and called to send me indoors to mama. Another man was able to strike the stake, therefore he won the prize – a fine box of cigars.”

Emma Myers Reed described in another story how the children entertained themselves: “We would go across the road from the store to go sit on the grassy, terraced slope; and there to watch the swallows as they gathered to swoop down the huge chimney that stood beside the mill. When all the birds were inside, a child would go and open the small door at the bottom of the chimney to shout, and they would fly off and away. We would sit and watch, and they would return to enter the chimney again. We thought it fun, but now, I say, ‘Poor little swallows.’ Then off we would run to play ‘I Spy.’ On that same grassy slope the men of the village planted a tall flag-pole when Benjamin Harrison was elected president in the autumn of 1888. I saw Mr. Isaac Sullivan help papa to raise the flag and saw it float in the breeze...That flag gave our village prestige.”

Mrs. Reed’s writings, which were published in 1961, described other everyday activities in the village of Pleasant Valley. It is particularly interesting when she reveals details about the community’s history, such as how Pleasant Valley got its name: By 1855, Edward Devilbiss was the storekeeper in a house that was one of only two buildings at the site of the town. “Miss Elizabeth Kurtz, of Baltimore, was visiting Miss Laura Devilbiss in the Edward Devilbiss home. One morning, she went out walking. She was thrilled by the scene of green meadows and rolling hills. On returning to the Devilbiss home, she remarked that such a picturesque place should have a name...she suggested that it be called Pleasant Valley.” The school house was built in 1859. The lots were laid off in 1868. The church was built in 1879.

To the members and former members of the 4-H club, I stressed that the work of the local historian is to find ways to document the everyday activities of past generations. Few people write down their reminiscences, such as Emma Myers Reed. But when they do, these manuscripts are extremely valuable documents for local history. It is important to be your own historian. Writing journals or reminiscences provides an excellent system to document your own personal history, as well as the history of your family and community. In addition, these are important ways to preserve our local history.

Being a historian, most of my time is spent looking at Carroll County’s past. But occasionally I get asked what I think about Carroll County’s future. This happened last week, when Dan Barkin, publisher of the *Carroll County Times*, asked me about the county’s future from a local history perspective.

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My response, which I also shared with the 4-H club members, is this: In the future, Carroll County will continue its slow evolution that has occurred for most of the 20th century moving from a rural to a suburban community. What keeps the county attractive is our ability to retain many of our rural traditions and the personal characteristics of community life. Our 4-H clubs, like other local organizations, teach children and newcomers many of these local customs that are worthy of preservation. In addition, there is a rich community heritage in our schools, clubs, fire departments, service organizations, religious institutions and local businesses. The challenge of the future will be to preserve and weave this fabric of our traditional communities into the context of a suburban county.

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Historical Society of Carroll County

Photo caption: A 1955 photo shows the first Easter sunrise service at the Westminster Community Pond. The tradition continues today.