

New roadside historic marker placed at birthplace of Union Mills' founders – July 28, 2024

Carroll County was recently honored with the installation of another roadside historic marker. Such markers are placed by the State Highway Administration to note sites of cultural significance along Maryland roadways. The State unveiled the latest marker on July 20, 2024, at Farm Content, the historic home of State Senator David Shriver, Sr., an 18th century Maryland politician. The timing of the marker installation could not have been better in the leadup to our nation's 250th birthday in 2026.

Nestled along the banks of Little Pipe Creek near the entrance to the Carroll Lutheran Village, west of Westminster, Farm Content may be most recognizable to Carroll Countians as the birthplace of the founders of Union Mills, the popular historic site north of Westminster. Andrew and David Shriver, Jr., who started the business enterprise at Union Mills in 1797, were born at the Little Pipe Creek farmstead in the 1760s.

Farm Content now joins Union Mills in historic recognition. In the era surrounding the American Revolution, David Shriver, Sr. was a leading Revolutionary War patriot, officer in the Maryland Militia, framer of Maryland's 1776 Constitution, and longtime state legislator. Shriver can truly be called one of our State's "founders." From his farm, Shriver later led a potent Jefferson-era voting bloc that played a key part in Maryland's early political history.

With his wife, Rebecca Ferree, David Shriver, Sr. settled along Little Pipe Creek in 1760 and raised eight children, at a time when the Westminster area remained sparsely populated. Shriver farmed and built a gristmill and tannery on the property. The son of German immigrants, Shriver spoke broken English and had no formal education, but despite these impediments rose to prominence due to his leadership at a time of great challenge in Maryland.

Starting in the 1760s, many in British North America grew to resent Great Britain's heavy-handed imposition of taxes on the colonies. German-speaking farmers in the Frederick County area (including what is now Carroll County) were particularly incensed by British taxes which, in their minds, supported the established Anglican Church which they did not attend.

The first major trigger of tensions leading to eventual independence was the Stamp Act, in 1765. Although the British Parliament eventually repealed the legislation, other taxes followed, including tariffs on glass, tea, and printing materials.

In her book *1774: The Long Year of Revolution*, Mary Beth Norton outlined the spiraling events leading to revolution, spurred by ongoing resentment over taxation of tea. King George III's subjects in North America increasingly rejected Parliament's efforts to expand its taxing authority here. Colonists' distaste for taxes culminated in the Boston Tea Party in December 1773.

After the events in Boston, and in reaction to onerous legislation enacted by the British Parliament in response to what happened there, revolutionary fervor grew in the colonies. Maryland was no exception.

Colonists gathered in provisional assemblies of questionable legitimacy to air their grievances. As reflected in the Proceedings of the Conventions of the Province of Maryland, 1774-1776, a convention convened in Annapolis during the summer of 1774 to appoint “deputies for this province, to attend a general congress of deputies from the colonies, at such time and place as may be agreed on to effect one general plan of conduct, operating on the commercial connection of the colonies with the mother country, for the relief of Boston and preservation of American liberty.” This “general congress” became the First Continental Congress.

When the First Continental Congress met in Philadelphia in September and October 1774, it set into motion the events leading to American independence. The Congress called for a ban on British imports, a policy to be enforced by local committees.

Taking a leadership role on this issue, David Shriver, Sr. joined Frederick County’s Committee of Observation, a local group formed to regulate the nonimportation policy. Later, Shriver took a commission as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Linganore Battalion of the Maryland Militia.

As recorded by one of Shriver’s sons, “So warm was he in the support of the rights of his country that his friends were alarmed for his safety, and his clergyman emphatically warned him to beware; that the powers placed over him were of God; that he would be hung for treason and his family made beggars.” Shriver rejected the admonitions.

In 1776, after independence became a reality, Frederick County residents elected David Shriver, Sr. to serve in an assembly in Annapolis, to form a new government for the state. Maryland’s 1776 Convention was the first statewide assembly after the Declaration of Independence.

The official proceedings reflect that the 1776 Convention met in Annapolis, starting in August that year. David Shriver, Sr. actively participated. According to these records, “the convention took into consideration the resolution of congress declaring the united colonies free and independent states, and thereupon [r]esolved unanimously, [t]hat this convention will maintain the freedom and independency of the United States with their lives and fortunes.”

Among the heady agenda items for the 1776 Convention: a constitution for the new State of Maryland, as well as a declaration of rights. The Declaration of Rights adopted by the Convention included the critical statement that “government of right originates from the people, is founded in compact only, and instituted solely for the good of the whole.”

For the first time in history, Marylanders were afforded constitutional protections including the separation of powers, freedom of speech, rights to redress for grievances, limits on taxation, rights against self-incrimination, rights against imprisonment without a “lawful judgment of his peers, or by the law of the land,” freedom of religion, and civilian control of the military.

Following the important work of 1776, David Shriver, Sr. continued to serve in elected positions in the State's General Assembly over a period of 30 years. He served in various sessions of the House of Delegates until 1804, when he was appointed to the State Senate. Shriver finally retired from elected office in 1810.

During his years in politics, Shriver headed a bloc of German-speaking farmers in the Frederick County area. Shriver opposed the Federalists (like John Adams and Alexander Hamilton) and their efforts to centralize power in the Federal government, instead supporting Thomas Jefferson and his policies.

Shriver and local Jeffersonians cheered with the first peacetime transfer of power from one political party to another, when Jefferson won the presidential election of 1800. Among Shriver's notable electoral victories in this era: an 1803 defeat of Federalist Roger Brooke Taney in the race for Maryland House of Delegates. Taney later become infamous as Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court for issuing the 1857 Dred Scott decision, holding that those who were enslaved were not citizens of the United States.

Maryland's historic roadside marker program dates to the 1930s when the Maryland State Roads Commission began installing markers noting places of historic importance. Later, the Maryland Historical Trust took over the program and it now collaborates with Maryland Department of Transportation on the markers.

The new roadside marker at Farm Content acknowledges David Shriver, Sr.'s record of service during our founding era. As we prepare to celebrate our nation's upcoming 250th anniversary, it is particularly fitting to acknowledge local contributions to our country's formation.

Guest columnist Samuel M. Riley, a local attorney and retired National Guard officer, serves as President of the Union Mills Homestead Foundation and researches local history. He can be reached at info@unionmills.org.

Image #1 Source: Samuel M. Riley CAPTION: A group gathers under the new roadside marker after it was unveiled on July 20, 2024. From left: Aaron Levinthal, Senior Archaeologist with the Office of Cultural Resources at the Maryland Department of Transportation; Gabriel Flannery, president of the Historic Shriver Graveyard, Inc.; Sam Riley, president of the Union Mills Homestead Foundation; and Delegate Eric Bouchat, from the Maryland House of Delegates.

Image #2 Source: Samuel M. Riley CAPTION: A roadside view of the brick farmhouse built circa 1795 by David Shriver, Sr. at Farm Content, along Old New Windsor Pike near Westminster. The property at Farm Content is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

