

"The Montour House"

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The staff of the Historical Society is frequently asked to help locate information about historical properties throughout the county. In many cases the property has not been researched and one must look for information in a variety of public and other sources. Occasionally, we find an early published history of a property. Such is the case of the former Montour House at 59 W. Main St. in Westminster; its early history was described in a former column in this paper:

"(Third of a series of articles on local history written for The Times by the Historical Section of the Senior Class of Western Maryland College.)

Points of historical interest abound in Westminster as in but few towns of its size or in even larger towns. Many of these things if traced from their origin would be subjects of great interest to every one historically inclined. In Westminster and the surrounding country there are churches, schools, manor houses, remains of various mines, hotels and taverns concerning which, historical lore has handed from generation to generation many interesting incidents.

How many people who daily have occasion to walk along West Main street between the streets of Bond and Carroll and upon passing the Montour House stop to consider for a moment anything of its age, its early existence or its service to Westminster? On the other hand, the majority of the people "pass by on the other side" concerned only with the rush of present day affairs. However as there are several interesting incidents connected with it, it shall be our aim to disclose something of its early history, tho' it is rather obscure.

In the year 1863, the land upon which the Montour House now stands was owned by a body corporate of Baltimore City called the Redemptorists. It was from the company that the builders of this old hotel obtained the land. The Records show that the land became the property of Edward Lynch and Frances H. Orendorff, May 13, 1863. At that time the lot was low and of a marshy nature, in fact it served as an admirable skating pond in the winter to all the boys in the surrounding neighborhood. But Lynch and Orendorff, seeing opportunity in this marshy lot bought it and in 1867, under their supervision, ground was broken for the newest and best hotel in Westminster, the Montour House. The building is a frame structure, three and one-half stories high, case in bricks of but one thickness.

To the first proprietors was left, by the owners, the naming of the hotel. The man upon whom this duty fell was John Arnold Kleff. He named it after a certain Montrose Hotel in Pennsylvania and situated in the Allegheny Mountains. This name in turn was derived from that of an old Indian Chief of whom we have further mention in a newspaper clipping quoted later.

The first proprietor, John A. Kleff, who was later proprietor of the old Albion Hotel, corner of Main street and Railroad avenue, was very successful in the new hotel. Traveling men deserted the older taverns and hotels and it was soon filled to its capacity by both transient and regular boarders. It was the scene of many social gatherings for it was the best equipped and largest hotel in town. Many organizations had occasion to banquet there as will be seen in another newspaper clipping. The table set by the proprietor was one of which any proprietor could justly be proud. The large and adequate stables in the

rear of the hotel also attracted many people from the surrounding country. Especially is this true of men who were impaneled from the rural districts to serve on juries. They would drive in town in the morning, put up their team and go to Court, coming back to the hotel to a big meal at the middle of the day.

An excellent idea of the accommodations furnished by the Montour House can be had from some newspaper clippings of the year 1870. One of these was a description given by a man who at certain intervals had occasion to visit Westminster and seemed to be interested in Westminster and its civil affairs. The clipping is dated June 7, 1870 and runs thus, "The Montour House is kept excellently by Mr. Kleff and is now filled with summer boarders, several of whom are from Baltimore. Guests appear to enjoy themselves admirably. They frequently indulge in hunting parties, drives, croquetting, etc., together with home amusements." Another clipping dated Oct. 3, 1870, was occasioned by the annual Carroll County Agricultural Fair which was held in Westminster. In speaking of hotel accommodations, it states, "The hotel arrangements are complete. The Montour House kept by John A. Kleff has superior accommodations for all who may give him a call." It is convenient to both the railroad and the show grounds. Still another clipping has been handed to us announcing an entertainment of the Addison Reunion Association as follows: "The Addison Reunion Association gave its closing entertainment June 9, 1871 at the Montour House, a noted hostelry which derived its name from a famous Indian Chief who flourished in colonial times." This association was literary in character and among its leading members were Dr. Chas. Billingslea and Rev. J. T. Ward, D. D., first president of Western Md. College, men who were intensely interested in the local affairs of Westminster.

A few years later a new proprietor was engaged. This man was Granville Wilson, who completely renovated the whole building. He made numerous improvements in the service, greatly improving the furnishings of the dining room especially. He introduced an excellent set of silverware having the name "Montour House, " well engraved on each piece. His proprietorship was a fairly successful one but as a paying proposition, the Montour House seemed to be slowly but surely falling back.

B. J. Mathias, Thomas B. Bond and William Crouse now succeeded each other in close succession and in the order named as proprietors of the hotel. Each man failed in it as a money making enterprise and during their proprietary there were but few or no incidents of public interest. However while Thomas B. Bond was proprietor, the great fire of 1883 occurred which swept the whole block opposite the Montour House besides the Lutheran Church and parsonage and several other buildings on Carroll street. From a newspaper of April 1883, we have the following clipping. "Thomas B. Bond, proprietor of the Montour House which stood opposite the scene of the fire, loses about \$250 on furniture damaged by water. Lynch and Orendorff, owners, think \$100 will pay for damage done the building by heat."

The trade of the hotel had now gradually fallen off until the only source of income was the bar which now assumed a great prominence in the existence of the Montour House. This may have been due to several reasons, chief of which no doubt was poor management for several years. Mr. Edward Lynch deeded his interest in the property to George W. Albaugh, December 2, 1896. In the following month, January 5, 1897, Frances H. Orendorff instructed his attorney to sell his share of the land. Grove A. Shipley bought the property from Geo. W. Albaugh, December 27, 1897.

The next man to become proprietor was Allen H. Frisk who remained in that capacity until the present owner assumed control. It was while Frisk was proprietor that a slight fire occurred which was soon extinguished by the fire department. Damage amounting to about \$200 chiefly by water occurred. While Frisk was proprietor, the property again changed hands. Grove A. Shipley died and his administrators, Elias G. Shipley and George A. Shipley, sold the property to the George W. Albaugh Real Estate and

Brokerage Co., Dec. 24, 1906. It was not until 1909 that they disposed of the property, selling it August 5, to John H. Six. This was the first case where owner was proprietor for that is the capacity in which John H. Six, acted and continues to act for he is the present owner and proprietor.

With the exception of the first few years of the hotel's existence, it was always operated at a financial loss to all concerned. Whether this is due to poor management or not is an open question but we see that at one time it held a prominent part in the affairs of Westminster and had the patronage of the leading men of the day who frequented this city. It seems as though it may be just another example of the results of too much freedom and personal liberty."

Photo caption: Wood cut of the Montour House from Westminster. Its Location and Advantages as a Place of Residence or for Business published in 1887. The property was the topic of a Western Maryland College student. Historical Society of Carroll County collection.