

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

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Lowly penny has rich history
By Jay Graybeal

When people save a family heirloom or a personal memento they often preserve the unique oral tradition surrounding the object. Later in life as memory fades, it is the object which serves as a reminder of times past. Sometimes a seemingly insignificant artifact is the key to revealing some facet of everyday life of a past generation.

Such is the case of a common penny given to a seven-year-old Carroll County school girl in 1872. Mrs. Mary E. (Polster) Ditman (1866-1957) recorded her memories of that event in an essay entitled "One Cent," written in 1955.

One Cent

"The owner of this one cent, and writer of this true story, was born 1866 in her parent's home on the Bloom Road in Carroll County Maryland, U.S.A. Westminster was about 4½ miles from where I was born, on the Bloom Road, as you went to Washington, D.C., said to be about 40 miles in Westminster. Our home on the left hand side of the Bloom Road was about 800 ft. to the Old Washington Road, as we went to go to the county seat.

"The Bloom Road was named after the owner of the mill, about one mile down by the stream that flowed into Morgan Run.

"Adam Bloom was a very genial gentleman. He grinded the wheat and the grains the farmers round about raised, into flour, meal and chops. He was allowed to take a certain toll out of a bushel for his pay and you could be sure Adam Bloom would never exceed taking the legal toll.

"He was very generous in his home. Every one was welcomed to share his board. His wife, "Polly" was a very pleasing and motherly woman. I think the phrase "Polly hand the pudding over, and we will all have tea" may have had its origin at the Bloom table, so very long ago.

"My parents married 1853, lived in Baltimore. My father bought the 15 acres of land in Carroll County near the beginning of the Civil War, 1860. The Bloom Road divided the acreage so that five acres, which had been cleared, was on the right hand side as you came from the Washington Road. The buildings were a log house, a stable and a log meat house. It was here I was born.

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"On the left hand were 10 acres of fine wood-land. In years after my father built here, and lived until he died in 1912, he made these 10 acres a beautiful country place.

"When I was three-years-old, my father sold the five acre home to Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Mullen, who were also from Baltimore. They were a welcome addition to the community. The doctors were few and at a distance. Mrs. Mullen was a graduated mid-wife and the mothers welcomed her. She was needed.

"After selling this home, my father bought 16 acres across on the left side of the Washington Road, built a house and we moved there. This was near 1869. It was near this time a weather-boarded school house had been built on the same side of the road as our new home. The General Assembly of Maryland passed the Public School Law, 1865. This school was named "Morgan Run" in Woolery's District No. 4, School No. 8. The School board commissioners, school trustees, and an examiner were to see to its proper functioning. They appointed Miss Amanda Nutting as its teacher.

"Miss Amanda was a very dignified and lovely young woman and a good teacher. She had a big job, about 40 to 50 pupils, all grades and all sizes, from six to 18 years of age. There may have been a few older.

"This school was built facing the road, about ¼ mile from our home. There was our large room with two rows of desks on either side of the tenplate stove in the middle of the room. To the right near the wall was the row for the large girls, next to the stove the small desks, for the little girls.

"On the left side near the wall, were the big boys desks. Girls and boys were supposed to be kept separate even at recess and lunch hours.

"Now there was a certain youth, Fremont W., who seemed to give Miss Amanda trouble. He was seated in one of the larger desks to the left side wall. He was not attentive to his studies, kept looking over and smiling at the big girls, 'flirting.' He gave Miss Amanda concern, and she was at a loss, how to make him attentive to his studies.

"I wonder yet – 'how she thought her method of correction' would help by coming and getting me to sit in his desk by his side Unless she thought it would make him ashamed.

"Well, it just didn't work. For she came near to breaking my heart, to sit by this big *ugly* man, I cried, and every time I'd look up at him, I cried louder and louder! She came and took me back

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to my desk. This did not mend it; for I would look across and start all over again. She came and finally said; if I would cease crying, she would give me some money. This worked for I loved that cent with the 'birdie' on it.

"I took this cent home to my mother, and asked her to keep it for me. I had earned it with tears. My mother said 'we will put it in this little blue tin box for safe keeping.' There it was for many years. And as I grew to see how a little child feels and sees things so different from growing up, I found it a good experience in life – to be wise and not offend a little child.

"Here you have the story of My First School, My First Teacher and My First Cent, M.E.D. I have the One Cent, A Flying Eagle Cent of the 1859 coinage given me 83 years ago. I am writing this story this 13th, July 1955. I am in my 90th year since March 19th, 1955. It is not type written for type machines were not in use in my school days or teaching days."

The writer of this charming reminiscence was at various times a school teacher, a charter member of the Zion Church Ladies Aid Society and a frequent contributor of poetry to the *Carroll County Times*. Her last work "Let's Be Kind" was written two months before her death in December 1957.

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Historical Society of Carroll County

Photo caption: Josephus and Mary Eva Ditman taken by F. B. Snyder of Oxford, Ohio. The Ditmans resided on the Ditman family farm from 1901 to 1915. Photo was gift of Elizabeth Mitten Merrill.