

Carroll's Yesteryears
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Death reveals more about Jacob Sherman
by Jay Graybeal

Two previous articles have explored the question, Who was Jacob Sherman? His home in Westminster, now a house museum of the historical Society of Carroll County, and Frederick County land records provided many details of his life. Jacob Sherman was taken ill in the spring of 1822 and died on July 7. Jacob Sherman's will and estate papers recorded by the Frederick County Register of Wills provide many details about the property, household furnishings, daily life, and family conflict.

Sherman bequeathed to his "Beloved wife Elizabeth" livestock, household and kitchen furniture, "all the Manufactured Cloth" and the "raw materials...Not Manufactured," and six black slaves. Mrs. Sherman also received all the rents and profits due on his real estate until 1829 when Sherman's grandson William Wagoner Shriver reached age 21. William also inherited Sherman's "plantation" or farm near Westminster. The widow was also allowed to live in the house until her death and received the ground rents due on the Westminster lots and \$1,000 in cash to dispose of as she thought proper. The will also provided that at her death the house and other properties adjoining Westminster would pass to grandson Jacob Sherman Shriver. The remaining property was divided equally between the three Shriver children. Sherman's daughter Eve Shriver received a small bequest of \$500. Jacob Sherman also freed six of his eight slaves through his will, a fairly common practice by Pennsylvania Germans in this period.

David and Eve Shriver contested the will by questioning Sherman's sanity since the will was executed shortly before his death. The Orphan's Court of Frederick County rejected their motion and directed the Shrivvers to pay court costs of over \$550. A Maryland Court of Appeals decree required the estate of Jacob Sherman to pay slightly less than one-half of the court costs. These divisive cases between family members were the culmination of differences between Jacob Sherman and the Shrivvers.

The 1823 inventory of Jacob Sherman's personal property provides considerable details about room usage, household furnishings, diet and the relative wealth of the household. Jacob Sherman's personal property was appraised at \$2,120.75, which amounted to perhaps one-tenth of his estate.

Sherman's inventory lists traditional Pennsylvania German items among an extensive list of Anglo-American items. The Pennsylvania German possessions were a clock and case, large German Bible, painted chest, feather beds, sauerkraut cutter and "crou tub." Among the Anglo-American items were a sideboard, corner cupboard, mahogany table, bureau, two silver watches, silver flatware and tea wares. Clearly, the Shermans had furnished their house much like their fashionable neighbors of English descent. They did, however, retain some traditional Pennsylvania German ways.

Like many of his well-to-do contemporaries, a significant portion of Sherman’s wealth was in the form of promissory notes, bonds and book debts. The inventory of nearly one hundred debts due his estate totaled \$13,716.55. However, the executors considered more than one-third to be uncollectable. Sherman had a sizable sum of cash (\$1568) in his possession at his death.

Regrettably, there are no known portraits of Jacob or Elizabeth Sherman. His inventory, however, provides a few details about his appearance. The appraised value of his wearing apparel (\$90), and his ownership of two silver watches reveals that he was well dressed. The presence of razors and a shaving box (\$.75) is evidence that he was at least partially clean shaven. Although a later resident wrote that both Shermans “spoke Dutch,” (German) both almost certainly learned English.

In many ways Jacob Sherman was representative of the first generation of native-born Pennsylvania Germans who became successful in Maryland. Provided with a lucrative tavern by his generous father, Sherman easily assimilated into the local English community. He wisely invested heavily in land which provided him with dependable income and allowed for his early retirement. Business pursuits apparently satisfied his social aspirations because he did not hold public, militia or church office. Sherman’s many successes, however, were tempered by family problems. His marriage produced no sons with whom to share the tavern business. His daughter suffered from a serious and little understood disease. A good relationship with his son-in-law and daughter, which resulted in the construction of a fine house for their joint residence, soured when the Shrivvers departed for Cumberland. The break was permanent.

Photo credit: Uncredited

Photo caption: Part of the inventory of Jacob Sherman’s personal estate.