

## "Christmas at the Alms House, 1897"

Carroll County Times article for 21 December 1997

By Jay A. Graybeal

The way in which our local poor were cared for was quite different a century ago. The County maintained an Alms House (now the Carroll County Farm Museum) as a residence for those who could not look after themselves. An Alms House steward resided in the house and was charged with caring for the residents and operating the facility which was originally designed as a working farm. Throughout the late nineteenth century, a group of local women provided additional support for the "inmates" especially at Christmas. A report of their 1897 activities appeared in the January 1, 1898 issue of the Democratic Advocate newspaper:

"To the People of Carroll County:

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." This was the text of our appeal for assistance in providing the inmates of our County Alms House with a little of the brightness of the Christmas season, and the liberal responses proved that there are many who recognize in our poor those of whom Christ was speaking and whom he called his brethren. At 2:30 p.m. on Monday, December 27th, there were assembled in the little room which we call "our chapel" all of the inmates, with the exception of five sick men who were unable to leave their rooms. In the adjoining room was seated an interested audience of some of Westminster's best citizens, whose faces showed their sympathy and interest and whose voices helped in the beautiful Christmas carols which were sung, to the great delight of the inmates. The pretty service consisted of a carol, "He Has Come;" prayer by Rev. Wm. A. Crouse; carol, "Story of Long Ago;" scripture reading, Rev. Joel Brown, pastor of the M. E. Church; carol, "Christ is Born;" Misses Bessie Herr and Nannie Rinker; recitation, Lilian Shipley; hymn, "The best friend to have is Jesus;" Address, Rev. W. R. Graham, D. D., pastor of the M. P. Church; carol, "Glory to God on High," with solo by Miss Blanche Bennett. The distribution of gifts followed, after which all united in reciting the Lord's Prayer and were dismissed with the benediction by Rev. Dr. Graham. Our only regret was the fact that all who so kindly aided us in giving this pleasure could not be present to see the happy, tearful faces and hear the fervent "God bless you and all our kind friends" which came from so many thankful hearts. Every woman was given a pair of stockings, an apron and a handkerchief and every man a warm pair of socks, a handkerchief and a package of tobacco, nearly all of which, with the exception of the tobacco, were donated by our liberal hearted young merchants, J. T. Orndorff's Sons, W. F. Derr and Miller Bros. Special gifts of little trifles to brighten their rooms or pretty work bags supplied with needles and thread and a bountiful supply of cake, fruit and confectionery were supplied by others of our citizens and Christmas brought blessings to both those who ministered unto. The presence of Mrs. Emanuel Shaeffer, a former stewardess, who is much loved by the older inmates, added greatly to the enjoyment. The sick were visited and made happy with prettily arranged baskets of fruit and other dainties.

The following contributed liberally, and through these columns we return the heartfelt thanks of the recipients of their bounty as well as of our entire committee. Cash donations-Mrs. Longwell, Mr. T. W. Mather, Mrs. Louisa Smith, Mr. William Coon, Miss Kitty Noel, Mrs. Broadwiser, Mr. Wm. H. Vanderford, Mrs. Isaac Baile, Western Maryland College Sunday School, Mr. D. N. Henning, Mr. William Struth, Miss Dorothy McDaniel, Mrs. W. R. Graham, Westminster; Mr. Frank Geatty, New Windsor; Mrs. Mitten, Wakefield; Mrs. Manahan, near Westminster. Gifts, confectionery cake and fruit-Mrs. Maulsby, Mrs.

Wm. Coon, Mrs. J. A. C. Bond, Mrs. Mary Wilson, Miss Eliza Shreeve, Miss Nettie Shreeve, Miss Amanda Stewart, Mrs. Emanuel Shaeffer, Miss Annie Albaugh, Mrs. Harry Allison, Mrs. J. W. Baldwin, Himler Bros., Albaugh & Babylon, Joseph Shreeve, J. D. Bowers, Miss Lizzie Herr, Mr. F. K. Herr, Dr. C. Billingslea, Mrs. Dr. Shipley, Miss Blanche Bennett, Mrs. U. L. Reaver, Miss Lillie Woodward, Mr. Townsend, Mrs. Wm. Cunningham, Miss Bessie Herr, Mrs. Erb, Mrs. Jesse Shreeve, Miss Jo. Hahn, Mrs. Rinker, Miss Eva Rinker, Mrs. Shellman, Miss Lottie Moore, Mrs. James Turfle; Miss Blanche Baer, Mrs. James Baer, Tannery. The following very unexpected letter was received too late for Christmas, but just in time to gladden our hearts with the means to purchase much wished for hymn books for our Sunday services and some very much needed articles for those who are sick and afflicted. Coming as it does from a native of Cuba, who spent a few months here as a student at Western Maryland College some years ago, it has an added value, from the fact that from an island already overwhelmed with sorrow it comes as a friendly message, full of sympathy to others. The letter was as follows:

MATANZAS, CUBA, December 21, 1897

Miss Mary B. Shellman, Westminster, Md.

My Dear Friend:-I have read your appeal in behalf of the poor at the Alms House, in the American Sentinel, of which I enclose the slip, and wishing to contribute towards the gifts offered them at Christmas I herewith hand you a draft, your order on----for ten dollars, U.S. currency, which please accept with my best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Your friend, PETER LAMOTHE.

Allow us to close this report with the words of the Savior in Lowell's beautiful poem, "The Vision of Sir Launfall;"

"The holy supper is kept indeed  
In whatso we share with another's need;  
Not what we give, but what we share,  
For the gift without the giver is bare;  
Who gives himself, with his alms, feeds three-  
Himself, his hungering neighbor and me."

MARY B SHELLMAN,  
NANNIE RINKER,  
Committee."

The acts of kindness shown by Miss Shellman and her friends demonstrate that while local government provided the basic care for the less fortunate members of Society, private citizens could and did make a difference in the quality of their lives.

Photo caption: Female residents of the Carroll County Alms House posed with a young woman and a baby at the turn of the century. Shellman Collection, Historical Society of Carroll County, gift of Rev. Paul Reese, 1941.