

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

"Dr. Woodward Remembers his Uncle Thee"

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By Jay A. Graybeal

More than 80 years ago, Theodore Englar of Wakefield, Maryland posed for a photographic portrait with a baby boy seated in his lap. The boy Theodore Woodward, had been named after his "Uncle Thee." The boy grew to be an eminent physician, author of a book on Carroll County physicians and a keeper of family and community oral traditions. This oral tradition forms a rich part of our local heritage.

Dr. Woodward has written a tribute to his Uncle Thee that will be included in the historical supplement to the Historical Society's new publication entitled "Carroll Record Histories of Northwestern Carroll County Communities." The following stories are a portion of Dr. Woodward's reminiscences about "Uncle Thee."

"I have always enjoyed the company of older people and Uncle Thee was among my favorites and not merely because mother and father named me after him. His wife, Aunt Renie, was a Roop, the sister of my father's mother who lived at Meadowbrook, a farm several miles northwest of College Hill. We lived next door to Uncle Thee since father bought the old Matthews home at 1 Park Place from him in 1928. Living next to Uncle Thee gave me ready access to their house and great opportunities to listen. Uncle Thee was 15 at the time of the Gettysburg battle, a major turning point of the Civil War. Some of the initial skirmishes were in Westminster. The guns of Gettysburg were heard in Westminster and Uncle Thee, as a boy, was on the battlefield the day after Picketts' charge. His memory was sharp and his stories of the blood, horror and stench remain fixed. He heard Lincoln's address in the Memorial Cemetery and saw the President lead the parade through Gettysburg's dirt streets. People snickered when they saw this very tall, bearded, rather awkward man, dressed all in black and a stovepipe hat, riding a donkey leading the parade to the cemetery. His legs were so long that his feet dragged along the ground. Uncle Thee heard his famous address after sitting through Everett's oration. Always there has been controversy over whether the speech was appreciated and applauded. Uncle Thee's version to me was at first everyone was completely captivated by Lincoln's brief impressive words which were then followed by solid applause. Lincoln was not the invited orator that day nor was he regarded then as an appealing speaker, yet, he uttered one of history's greatest speeches.

In 1918, the women's movement exerted enough pressure to force the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution outlawing alcohol. Uncle Thee had always liked a drink or two and made full preparation for the anticipated long, dry spell. For the purpose, he purchased a barrel, 55 gallons of whiskey, Maryland rye, and placed it in his cellar. Tom, his black servant, had come into town from the farm when that move was made. Incidentally, every day of his life, Tom shaved Uncle Thee in the kitchen. I remember witnessing this event many times. Tom cut his hair, too. To return to the whiskey, something happened, the nature of which is not fully known. Tom either got into the contents of the barrel or just made a mistake. In any event, he poured a bucket of paint into the barrel of spirits. Uncle Thee took this as a prophetic omen and decided to abandon alcoholic beverages. At the end of the nineteenth century, after his presidency, General Grant traveled from town to town. On several occasions, Uncle Thee had drinks with this memorable military man and President.

My uncle's equanimity, humor and practical sense was very impressive to me as a boy. At his mill, he had a safe--the door was not locked and there was a sign "this safe is not locked." It cost several hundred dollars, I suppose, and he figured it better to avoid destruction of the safe in that way. Money was never stolen from the safe.

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Aunt Renie, Uncle Thee's wife and my father's aunt, died in 1939 of gastric cancer for which we physicians could do nothing. She was a delightfully kind person and they were an ideal couple for seventy years. Several things she said to me have stuck in my memory. "Theodore, pennies make dollars." Her gallbladder was diseased and bothered her from time to time. She would say, "My gallbladder is sluggish, I think that I will drink a half glass of warm olive oil." This was not bad reasoning for a sleepy gallbladder. Also, Aunt Renie would say, "It's going to rain soon, my joints hurt." All of this was good, solid, practical advice for a young boy who might consider medicine as a career. During the summer, she kept me supplied with iced cold watermelon. Also, Uncle Thee taught me how to get a melon in late September, shellac it all over to keep the air out, and take it down to the Koontz ice house. It would keep until Christmas which made a unique dessert. Uncle Thee lived several years more, remained himself, and died quietly in 1941.

During his lingering years, we put him on an ounce or so of whiskey at the end of the day which sparked this appetite and served as a good expectorant. Once, when in his nineties, I caught him with his glasses on the end of his nose, reading the newspaper. "Uncle Thee," I said, "why do you wear glasses?" "Dorey, don't you think I ought to look my age?"

The reproduction of "Carroll Record Histories of Northwestern Carroll County Communities" is nearly completed, however, there is still time for a few last minute additions. If you would like to reserve an entry to record a family, business, church, community or tribute - please contact the Historical Society as soon as possible at (410) 848-6494.

Photo Caption: Theodore Englar and Theodore Woodward c.1914. Photograph courtesy of Dr. Theodore Woodward.