

## *Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles*

Carroll's Yesteryears  
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Gill groundbreaking a blast  
by Joe Getty

The Historical Society is reviewing the decade of the 1940s in preparation for our annual fundraiser on May 11. This year's theme is "A Celebration of the Fabulous Forties," and the gala ball will include an exhibit about Carroll County life fifty years ago.

It was traditional for Carroll County's communities to hold dances in the local gymnasium and the Historical Society has selected Gill Gymnasium at Western Maryland College as the location for the dance. Gill Gymnasium was built by the college in 1939.

The groundbreaking ceremony for Gill Gymnasium that was reported on the front page of the Decemer 16, 1938 edition of *The Democratic Advocate* drew attention due to the novel method for removing the first shovel-full of dirt:

### DYNAMITE USED AT W.M.C Governor-Elect Herbert R. O'Connor Sets Off Charge

Many alumni and guests gathered in the dining hall of Western Maryland College Friday evening to launch a college building project with a banquet and groundbreaking ceremony. With the pressure of an electric switch at 9 o'clock Governor-elect Herbert O'Connor exploded two charges of dynamite that started the excavations for the proposed new men's dormitory and field house.

With the inclement weather, the parade which had been planned, was called off and the ceremony was held in the dining hall following a turkey and oyster banquet given by the Carroll County Alumni Association of the college. Governor-elect and Mrs. O'Connor and Dr. Harry C. Byrd, President of the University of Maryland were guest of honor.

Following the detonations of the dynamite charges set off by Mr. O'Connor, the guests watched from the darkened banquet hall the display of fireworks and a bonfire by students on the approximate site of the new buildings.

The construction of the buildings is to begin about January 15. The men's dormitory will cost \$150,000 and the field house \$70,000. The dormitory will provide rooms for 130 students and the field house will have a seating capacity of 1,000 for indoor sports. The money required has been raised by subscriptions and the selling of bonds.

The laying of the cornerstone took place at the commencement exercises for the class of 1939. The memorabilia that was deposited in the cornerstone included the list of contributors of the

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building fund, list of the 1939 Board of Trustees, list of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary class of 1889, copy of the WMC Bulletin and the pen used to sign the diplomas for the class of 1939.

The gymnasium was named in honor of Colonel Robert J. Gill, a graduate in the class of 1910. Gill was a major benefactor to the college and had been an excellent athlete during his undergraduate years. He was captain of the 1909 football team that was one of the college’s most successful. Dr. Keith Richwine has documented the service of Colonel Gill as trustee to the college as well as his illustrious military career.

The architectural design of the brick gymnasium used Colonial Revival details to blend the building in with the other mid-twentieth century buildings on campus and in the college’s master plan. The gymnasium consisted of two rectangular structures including a one-story section that contained the foyer and administrative offices. The visual focus of the building is on this section, and thus its detailing has Colonial Revival features such as the projecting pedimented entrance with quoins and an arched doorway with a large fanlight. Behind this section is a tall rectangular structure with a gable roof that enclosed the main playing floor and “telescopic bleachers.”

The historical society will be decorating the gym’s interior with crepe paper in the 1940s style for the Celebration of the Fabulous Forties. This event will include a dinner/dance with 1940s attire and big band music by the Carl Hamilton Band. Free dance lessons are being offered by Dancing Made Easy for guests who will be attending this event. A special program will be published about the decade of the 1940s in Carroll County. For information, contact the historical society at 848-6494.

*Photo credit: Courtesy of Historical Society of Carroll County*

*Photo caption: Gill Gymnasium at Western Maryland College had a unique groundbreaking in 1938 when Governor-Elect Herbert O’Conor detonated a charge of dynamite.*