

"The Forks Renaissance"

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By Jay A. Graybeal

The demolition of an old building at the intersection of W. Main St. and Pennsylvania Ave., in Westminster, an area known as "The Forks", spurred the editor of the Westminster American Sentinel newspaper to write an article in the August 8, 1924 issue of the paper:

" 'The Forks' Regaining Its Old Prestige.

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Old Buildings Demolished.

The old frame store and dwelling at "The Forks," this city, has been razed by Mr. Roy Shipley, a recent purchaser.

The old building had quite a history and was one of the landmarks of this city.

'Dead End,' 'The Forks,' and 'Irishtown.'

For quite a number of years before the Civil War, Westminster was divided into three distinct settlements known as 'Dead End,' 'The Forks,' and 'Irishtown.' The east end was dubbed 'Dead End' because it was the oldest of the three settlements, having been laid out as the original 'Town of Westminster.' Later on the turnpike road was built from Baltimore, through Westminster, to Chambersburg, Pa. Later still the soil road, afterwards a plank road, from the turnpike at west end of town was laid out to Taneytown and Emmitsburg, making a fork of the two roads, which spot has been known ever since as 'The Forks.'

Old-time Prestige of the 'The Forks.'

Naturally a number of merchants began business at 'The Forks.' A large hotel, or tavern, was built, and a business rivalry began between 'Dead End' and 'The Forks.' The old building just demolished was built by one of the original merchants and was used for commercial purposes until abandoned recently by Mr. Frank T. Shaeffer, who, for many years, conducted a tinning and plumbing business in it.

On the west side of the old building was an addition containing two rooms on the first floor and two on the second, which, for many, many, years were used by different young doctors as offices, among them being the late Dr. James H. Billingslea, and the late Dr. Joseph T. Hering.

During the Civil War the old Anchor Hotel immediately across the street from the old building, demolished by Mayor Howard E. Koontz and his residence erected on the site, was a favorite plan of the Union men to foregather and discuss the struggle between the States. During a fight in the old tavern, which ended in the death of a man named Shaw, who, it was claimed was a Southern sympathizer, a bullet fired from a pistol lodged in the door jamb of the old building just demolished, and remained there.

Fortunes Made at 'The Forks.'

The foundations of a least two modest fortunes were made at 'The Forks.' One by the late Joshua Yingling, who built and for many years occupied as a general store the building in which Mr. George R. Grumbine now conducts a grocery store. In this building as employees of Joshua Yingling Messrs.

George W. Albaugh, Jesse C. Sharrer and the late George E. Sharrer, of this city, began their successful business careers.

In the old building just demolished by Mr. Shipley, and in the one adjacent, now occupied by Mr. Shipley the late John L. Reifsnider, as a merchant, laid the foundation of his fortune.

The extreme west end of Westminster received the name of 'Irishtown' because prior to the Civil War three brothers, Dennis, James, and Terence Boylan, who came here from Ireland and helped build the Western Maryland Railroad from near Glyndon to Westminster, built themselves modest homes on the then sparsely settled part of what is now Pennsylvania avenue.

'The Forks' Regaining Its Prestige.

With the razing of old buildings, the erection of modern ones, the increased number of stores and the advent of the automobile and hard roads 'The Forks' has regained its old time, and for a number of years lost, prestige as a business center of Westminster. The many hard roads leading from the north, east and west to 'The Forks,' and the advantage of a very large open space for parking machines are factors in the commercial advantages possessed by that part of Westminster."

As the article notes, the confluence of several major roads made "The Forks" an ideal business location. It is interesting to note that the editor thought that the automobile and paved roads would bring renewed prosperity. Increased traffic, however, has challenged drivers and led to a project to change the traffic patterns west of "The Forks" in the near future.

Photo caption: This turn-of-the-century image shows "The Forks" in Westminster decorated for a parade. Partly visible at left is Frank Shaeffer's store demolished in 1924. The Anchor Hotel, also demolished, featured a spacious porch and a pump in front of the building. Historical Society of Carroll County, J. Leland Jordan Collection, gift of The Commissioners of Carroll County, 1955.