

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

Carroll's Yesteryears
11 August 1991

Papers, photos provide clues to history of Kimmey house
by Joe Getty

One of the staff research projects at the historical society this summer is to investigate the history of the Kimmey House, which serves as the administrative building for our organization. With the help of middle school students who participated in a summer education program, we explored a number of resources that are available for researching an early house in Carroll County.

The Kimmey House is located at 210 East Main Street in Westminster. The original lot was sold by William Winchester in 1788 to Andrew Reese. During the early 19th century, the property contained the house and residence of Dr. George Colgate, who is described in the recent historical society publication *Carroll County Physicians of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* by Theodore E. Woodward, M.D.

Nathan I. Gorsuch purchased the property in the mid-19th century and operated a clothing store in the easternmost section of the house. He established a prosperous business and later moved his store to West Main Street. In 1881, he purchased the grain elevator and milling business that was located on West Main Street near the railroad tracks.

We know from his obituary that Nathan Gorsuch continued in the grain business and resided at the Kimmey House until his death in 1902. Over the years, the house passed through his family to his granddaughter Mary Test Kimmey.

The historical society has a photograph in the J. Leland Jordan collection that shows the storeroom of the Nathan I. Gorsuch & Son company. We also have found this business history from the August 9, 1912 edition of the Westminster newspaper, *The American Sentinel*:
"Industries of Westminster – The N.I. Gorsuch & Son Co. – Grain Dealers

"Prior to the Civil War Westminster was known as a large wagon hamlet as it was the gathering place for the farmers and hucksters en-route to Baltimore to dispose of their marketing and crops from the surrounding farms. The Western Maryland Railroad had not reached this place and all farm produce was hauled to Baltimore over the Baltimore and Reisterstown turnpike. The building of the Western Maryland Railroad to Westminster in 1861 made many changes in the manner of conducting business. To be sure it was not much of a road but it was much more easy to send farm produce to Baltimore over it than to haul the same over the turnpike.

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"Realizing the changed conditions, Mr. Samuel Cover and Mr. J. Henry Hoppe, two of Carroll County's astute business men, conceived the idea of erecting a warehouse, with a railroad switch along side, for the purpose of storing grain and shipping the same to Baltimore in carload lots instead of sending it in wagon loads. And so, in 1861, they built the warehouse now occupied by the N. I. Gorsuch Son Co., situated on Main Street immediately West of the railroad, and in the late summer or early Fall, of that year Messrs. Samuel Cover and Peter B. Meixell under the firm name and style of Cover and Meixell began the business of buying wheat, oats, corn, clover seed and other farm produce, thus creating a home market for the farmers of the surrounding county.

"Messrs. Cover and Meixell were succeeded by Messrs. Peter B. Meixell and John Thomas Orendorff as Meixell and Orendorff, the latter's father, George Orendorff, having become the owner of the warehouse property. Meixell and Orendorff were succeeded by J. T. and Geo. Orendorff Jr., the latter later withdrawing and being succeeded by Denton Gehr who formed a copartnership with J. T. Orendorff under the style of Gehr and Orendorff. In 1871 J. T. Orendorff withdrew leaving Denton Gehr the sole proprietor, who remained in business until his death in July 1881.

"Upon the death of Mr. Gehr the firm of Nathan I. Gorsuch and Charles C. Gorsuch, trading as N. I. Gorsuch and Son, was formed and the business of the deceased was taken over. The latter firm in keeping with the march of progress, soon found that its business would need more room and other accommodation, and so in 1885 a grain elevator, for the better handling of the grain offered was built. In 1890 a large flour mill with a capacity of 160 barrels of flour per day was added and in 1888 a large straw and hay packing plant was erected completing what it now the largest warehouse and mill equipment in the county.

"The flour manufactured by the firm found ready sale in all the large cities of the East and some of the baled hay and straw has been sold as far West as California. The grain elevator has room for the storage of 25,000 bushels of grain and at times the firm has on hand over 150 tons of bales hay and straw. The amount of sales of flour alone amounts to over \$100,000 per annum and the business is still on the increase.

"Shortly after the death of Mr. Nathan I. Gorsuch which occurred in 1902, the corporation of the N. I. Gorsuch Son Company was formed with Mr. Charles C. Gorsuch, president and Mr. John T. Brown, who has been connected with the business since February 20th, 1871, as secretary and treasurer. Since the incorporation of the business a profit sharing arrangement has been instituted by the president whereby each employee receives a portion of the net profits of the business of each year, the dividend being made at the end of the business year, June 30th.

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“In addition to the grain, hay etc. the company handles fertilizers, potatoes and conducts a general warehouse business.”

Over the next year, we will be continuing our research of the Kimmey House so that we can learn more about its architecture and landscape. If you have information about the house and its previous owners, and in particular about Nathan I. Gorsuch and his business ventures, please contact the historical society at 848-6494.

Photo credit: Courtesy of Historical Society of Carroll County

Photo caption: The photograph of the storeroom of Nathan I. Gorsuch and Son Company provides a rare view of the interior of a turn-of-the-century business in Westminster.