

"The Death of Joseph M. Parke, Esq."

Carroll County Times article for 15 February 1998

By Jay A. Graybeal

A century ago, the local press recorded the death of Joseph M. Parke, Esq., a leader in the early history of the county. The February 19, 1898 issue of the Westminster American Sentinel newspaper carried a unusually detailed obituary of this prominent citizen:

"The venerable Joseph M. Parke, Esq., the last survivor of those who were prominently identified with the early history of Carroll county, died at half-past 8 o'clock, yesterday morning, at the residence of his son, George M. Parke, Esq., on Court street this city, after an illness of several months. Mr. Parke was born near Parkesburg, Pa., February 6.h, 1810 and his age was, therefore, 88 years and 12 days. In 1823, at the age of thirteen years, he went to the classical school of Rev. Samuel Parke, of the Presbyterian Church, at Slate Ridge, near Delta, Pa., and while pursuing his studies there, also assisted as a teacher. He subsequently went to a college at Canonsburg, Pa., where he graduated in 1831, and in the same year became the first principal of the Manchester Academy, at Manchester in this county. He continued in that position until 1839, with the exception of one year, in the meantime pursuing the study of the law under the direction of Chas. F. Mayer, of Baltimore.

Mr. Parke was a Democrat and in 1839 was elected a member of the Maryland House of Delegates on the ticket of that party, and served with ability and credit as a member of the General Assembly. In 1840 he was admitted to the bar in Baltimore City and removed, the same year, to Westminster, and engaged in the practice of his profession. He also became identified with the press of the county, having purchased the Democrat and Carroll County Republican, a Democratic newspaper, of which he remained the editor and publisher for eight years. In 1851 he was elected a member of the Constitutional Convention on a ticket composed of three Democrats and three Whigs, of whom he was the last survivor.

In 1853 Mr. Parke was appointed Register of Wills of Carroll county to fill a vacancy, and at the ensuing election, in the same year, was elected for the full term of six years. He was re-elected in 1859 and served till 1865, when he declined to be a candidate. In 1866 he purchased the Democratic Advocate, but was only connected with the paper a short time when he sold it to Mr. Wm. H. Davis, of Baltimore, who in 1868 disposed of it to the Messrs. Vanderford. In 1867 he was again elected Register of Wills and served until 1873. Since that time he has devoted himself to the practice of the law in the courts of the county. His knowledge of testamentary law was probably more extensive than that of any member of the bar in this county. In fact, few if any lawyers in this State were as familiar with that branch of legal learning. He was also well equipped for the practice of the other branches of the profession, and for a number of years was a commissioner in chancery. In 1835 Mr. Parke married Miss Amanda Motter, daughter of the late George Motter, of Manchester, who died some years ago. Five of their children survive him, namely: Mr. George M. Parke, of this city, who has served as an officer of the Orphans' Court for thirty years, having been Deputy Register of Wills for eighteen years and Register for twelve years, and proved a worthy successor of his honored father; Mrs. E. K. Gernand and Mr. John F. Parke, of Baltimore; Mrs. Jacob Fleagle, of Taneytown, and Mrs. Josephine A. Taylor. He also leaves a number of grandchildren, among who are F. Neal Parke, Esq., a rising young lawyer of the Westminster bar; Mr. R. Abner Parke, of this city and Mr. George F. Parke, of Baltimore.

Mr. Parke was, throughout his long life, a member of the Democratic party, but patriotism was stronger with him than party influence and association. In 1860 he supported Stephen A. Douglas for the Presidency and became a pronounced and earnest supporter of the Union during the Civil War which followed the election of Mr. Lincoln. After the war he supported the policy of President Johnson.

Mr. Parke was one of the best known and highly venerated citizens of this county. He was a man of uncompromising integrity of character and sincere piety. He was a member of Grace Lutheran Church of this city, and until a late period a teacher in the Sunday School. He was a man of noble presence and his venerable form was a conspicuous figure on the streets of Westminster for fifty-eight years, and until a few months ago. Until a very recent period he was a regular attendant at the morning and evening services of the church with which he was so long connected, and of the council of which he was for many years the secretary. His presence has been greatly missed in the church since his illness and his death causes unwonted sadness to the hearts of those who have been so long associated with him in that relation.

Mr. Parke was endowed with more than ordinary intellectual ability, and was scrupulously conscientious in his opinions, which were always formed, even in matters of minor importance, after the most careful investigation. He never jumped at conclusions, but when his opinion was once formed he was as immovable as a rock in maintaining it. His life was singularly pure and blameless in all its phases and relations with his fellow-man, and its every act was based upon a conscientious conviction of duty. He was, indeed, a man "in whom was no guile." Words need not be multiplied to emphasize the profound respect in which he was held by all classes of the community of which he was so many years a member.

Funeral services Sunday afternoon at 2 P.M., at Grace Lutheran Church."

In addition to being highly detailed, the Sentinel obituary was especially complementary given Parke's politics and that the paper was the voice of local Republicans. In this case, politics were set aside as residents mourned the loss of one of the great figures in early county history.

Photo caption: Judge Francis Neal Parke was described as a "rising young lawyer" in his father's 1898 obituary. Judge Parke later wrote the definitive history of the founding of Carroll County. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of Mrs. James Boylan, Jr., 1981.