

"Wampler's Pumpkin Contests"

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By Jay A. Graybeal

Carroll's farmers have traditionally been rewarded with an abundance of agricultural products. Local newspaper editors often published brief articles about the extraordinary fruit, vegetables, livestock, etc., brought in by subscribers. In fact, such notices occasionally sparked a rivalry among editors and their readers as to who could outdo the other in some category of agricultural produce.

A more formal contest was the First Annual Fair of The Carroll County Agricultural Association held in Westminster in 1869. Contestants vied for cash prizes and certificates in a wide variety of categories including livestock, produce, needlework and other items.

A later and unique annual contest was sponsored by Westminster furniture dealer Atlee W. Wampler, Sr., beginning in 1922. Mr. Wampler invited local residents to enter pumpkins which he displayed in his storefront window at 55 E. Main St. Judges examined and weighed the pumpkins and awarded cash prizes for the largest examples. The first contest was won by Joshua J. Hesson of Westminster for a pumpkin weighing 90 pounds. He received a \$7.00 first prize and a number of other entrants took home cash prizes.

The Fifth Annual Pumpkin and Apple Show (apples had been added in 1924) was described in this paper:

"The fifth annual pumpkin show and apple display being held in the Atlee W. Wampler's furniture store, East Main street, October 16th to November 16th, in connection with the Your Home Should Come First Sale of Home Furnishings, has proved a wonderful success in spite of the very dry season, the entries number as many, and the pumpkins larger than in 1925 show.

The window is attractively decorated with the large pumpkins, apples, and Hallowe'en suggestions and the Hallowe'en colors draped through the store. The exhibit has caused larger interest among the pumpkin growers of the county than any previous show.

In the 1925 pumpkin show the smallest pumpkin to come in for prize money offered, weighed 50 pounds, the smallest pumpkin to win prize money in 1926 weighed 60 pounds or more.

One pumpkin, one year old, shown by Willis Wampler in 1925 was again on exhibition for the 1926 display, in a perfect condition.

The choice apples on exhibition by the apple growers of Carroll county, has received marked attention by every one. Anyone desiring to purchase apples for winter use, certainly should see the many varieties and fine fruit that our Carroll county people are offering for sale at reasonable prices."

Arthur Lambert of Medford brought in the largest pumpkin which weighed 127 1/2 pounds. The pumpkins were judged by J. Ezra Stem, John H. Mitten editor of this newspaper, and John D. Bowers the "soda and ice cream man." Stoner Bros., Medford won the apple contest judged by A. F. Vierheller, Horticulturist, University of Maryland at College Park; Fenby Herring, farmer and E. K. Walrath, County Agent.

The Tenth Annual Show in 1931 was much like earlier shows, however, there were additional agricultural products on display. Local growers entered sweet potatoes, sure crop corn, turnips, battons, stock beets, gourds, quinces, turnips and pears. The judges for the pumpkin contest were James Pearre Wantz, cashier of Union National Bank; Truman B. Cash, insurance agent, and Claude T. Kimmey, manager of this newspaper. The prize winning pumpkin weighed 116 pounds and was grown by Woodrow Thomas of Sykesville. Thomas received the \$6.00 prize; a tidy sum for the Depression. The judges for the apple contest were Langdon C. Burns, County Agent and A. F. Vierheller. A perennial favorite, Stoner's Orchard of Medford, won the first prize of \$3.50.

Wampler's Pumpkin and Apple Contest continued for many years and became a popular local event. The contest benefited the winners, especially during the Depression, and also brought potential customers into Mr. Wampler's furniture store.

Photo Caption: Mr. Atlee W. Wampler, Sr., posed in the showroom of his Westminster furniture store in c 1925. Visible in the image are the variety of furnishings sold by the store including ice boxes, cedar chests, smoking stands, china cupboards, lamps, bureaus, tables etc. Beginning in 1922 Mr. Wampler sponsored an annual pumpkin contest in his store window. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of Mrs. Atlee W. Wampler, Jr., 1996.