

"Rural Free Delivery Was Not Universally Accepted"

Carroll County Times article for 9 January 2000

By Jay A. Graybeal

Carroll Countians have been justly proud of having the first county wide rural free delivery system in the nation. The introduction of the new mail delivery system in December 1899, however, was not universally accepted by local residents. In fact, there was open hostility in some communities and the local press carried numerous articles including several in the January 9, 1900 issue of the Westminster American Sentinel:

The Snydersburg correspondent wrote sarcastically:

"We have a very good mail system through this section. Some persons get their mail at their doors, while others have to go half a mile for it and some of them get no mail at all. Who can help but say that it is nice. We formerly got our mail in the morning. Now we can wait till evening, which is much nicer than to get it in the morning. We hope the postal authorities will bring the system to their own doors and see how they will like it. Let them think of doing unto others as they would like to have them do unto them. If we do business today, or the last of the week, or some other time, why it is all right. We kindly ask for early mails as before."

The Sentinel also carried an article about a meeting of an Anti-Free Rural Delivery committee:

"The hostility which has been manifested against the system of Free Rural Mail Delivery, recently introduced in this county, and which has had frequent expression in the Sentinel's correspondence from all parts of the county, had further proclamation by the action of a meeting held at Odd Fellows' Hall, this city, on Thursday. The meeting was called to protest against the system and to take steps, in an organized way, to lay the objections of the protestants before the Postoffice Department in a united and intelligent manner. The weather was very threatening in the morning and a freezing rain began to fall at an early hour, but notwithstanding this fact, several hundred persons were present at the meeting, nearly all of them from the rural districts of the county and numbers of them from its remotest limits. Not all of them, however, were inimical to the system, but those who held other views on the subject did not assume any part in the proceedings, further than to vote against the resolutions submitted, and which will be found in this report.

The meeting was conducted in a quiet, orderly and perfectly respectful manner. No loud denunciation of the system or harsh criticism of the postal authorities was indulged, though the opposition to the service was marked and emphatic. Those who had charge of the meeting and the opponents of the new order of things bore themselves with the dignity of free American citizens who, feeling themselves aggrieved by the action of the government in the matter, realized their right to object, in a respectful manner, to the continuance of their grievance. On the other hand, those who were not in sympathy with the object of the meeting forebore to make themselves disagreeable by injecting discord into the counsels of the assemblage. The proceedings were, in this respect, highly creditable to all concerned and it is a matter of just pride that a meeting involving issues calculated to excite more or less rancorous feeling should have been conducted with so much intelligence and decorum.

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Howard M. Zile, of Winfield, a well known and decided opponent of the new system, and a leading spirit in the steps taken to bring about concerted action against it. Dr.

Luther Kemp was elected chairman, and upon assuming that station, briefly stated the object of the convention. Mr. George A. Leister, of Manchester district, was elected secretary.

After organizing the first business transacted was the adoption of a motion to appoint a committee on resolutions of two persons from each election district represented. The districts were called and the following were named as that committee, with the addition of one from each postoffice abolished in adjacent counties, outside of Carroll."

The committee passed several resolutions which generally stated that the new system was impractical and that citizens preferred the old system.

The newspaper also carried an article from supporters of the new system. They acknowledged that there were flaws in the system and reported that existing routes were being modified and new routes were being planned in an effort to improve the system. Fortunately, these efforts were successful and organized opposition to the new system soon disappeared.

Photo caption: Dr. Luther Kemp was elected chairman of an organization of local citizens opposed to the introduction of Rural Free Delivery. Historical Society of Carroll County collection.