

Carroll Yesteryears

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In the 1870s, Summer Fun was Never Far Away

By Mary Ann Ashcraft

According to Carroll County newspaper accounts in the summer months of the 1870s, the local population could find nice opportunities for entertainment without going very far.

One yearly event in Westminster was based on the chivalrous days of knights in shining armor—a jousting tournament followed by a costume ball. The following report appeared in an issue of the *American Sentinel*:

The morning of Thursday last dawned auspiciously for the gallant Knights who had entered the lists to contend for the prizes and privileges of the Tourney. Soon the street leading to the Fair Grounds was thronged with an eager multitude, in carriages, on horseback, and on foot, pressing towards the scene of the day's diversion. About half past ten o'clock the Knights paraded through the city, in knightly costume headed by the National Grays Band. They were met at the West End by the Frizzellsburg Silver Cornet Band, who accompanied them on their return to the Fair Grounds, where they were appropriately addressed by Hon. Wm. M. Merrick. The tilting then commenced, the following Knights appearing in the lists: J. F. Miller, Knight of Rocky Ridge; Jacob Newcomer, Knight of Emmittsburg; H. N. Zile, Knight of Hunkadora; J. Zur Buchen, Knight of Black Plume; George Shumaker, Knight of Red Cloud; John G. Shunk, Knight of Mountain View; Samuel Reindollar, Knight of Taneytown; G. W. Motter, Knight of Abdallah Stead; William Burgoon, Knight of Erin; John Shaffer, Knight of Edgewood; N. Bruce Boyle, Knight of Carroll; Harry Lilly, Knight of Conowago; Thomas Henifer, Knight of Lost Cause; J. Grason, Knight of Baltimore County; Joshua S. Burke, Knight of Malta; E. L. Jacobs, Knight of New Windsor; William Shunk, Knight Before Last; and Mr. McCurdy, Knight of Washington city.

The ring, which was 2 inches in diameter, was hung immediately in front of the judges stand. The Knights were required to ride 100 yards in 12 seconds, and it was soon apparent that skillful horsemanship and a well practiced hand were necessary to take the ring at that rate of speed. Each Knight rode five times, when it was found that only two of them, Messrs. Miller and Motter had not missed taking it a single time. The next most successful were Messrs. Grason, Jenifer and Reindollar, who were tied, each having taken the ring three times. A 1½ inch ring was then substituted and Messrs. Miller and Motter contended for the first prize, a silver pitcher and goblets, and the privilege of naming the Queen of Love and Beauty, which was won by Mr. Miller, he having taken the ring twice, and Mr. Motter but once. The second prize, a handsome saddle and bridle was awarded to Mr. Motter, who also won the privilege of naming the first Maid of Honor. Mr. Grason won the right to name the second Maid of Honor and Mr. Jenifer the third. At the request of the Knights, the running race then took place. After this race the successful Knights proceeded in the most interesting part of the exercises – the selection of the Queen and her Maids of Honor. Mr. Miller crowned as Queen of Love and Beauty, Miss Rebecca Butler, of

Westminster; Mr. Motter crowned as first Maid of Honor, Miss Buffington, of Bruceville; Mr. Grason crowned as second Maid of Honor, Miss Mary B. Shellman, of Westminster; and Mr. Jenifer crowned as third Maid of Honor, Miss Kate Woods, of Westminster, after which a brief but beautiful and eloquent coronation address was delivered by Hon. John E. Smith. At night a ball was given at Wheeler's Hotel [later known as the Main Court Inn at the corner of East Main and Court streets], and dancing was kept up until a late hour.

In 1874, an issue of the *Democratic Advocate* reported the following summer event:

GRAND SOIREE MUSICALE—Free, Gratis, For Nothing—A number of our fun-loving 'bloods' got hold of an Italian organ-grinder, on Wednesday night, and in the 'wee suma hours ayant the twal,' gave our 'wide awake' as well as our slumbering citizens the benefit of a free concert. We were 'dozing, sweetly dozing,' wrapped in the arms of—Morpheus, when the party established themselves beneath our window, and treated our dull tympanum to 'Dixie,' 'Father, dear Father, come home with me now,' and sundry other tunes, schottisches and waltzes, making the 'stilly night' air sweetly musical, until we dropped off again into the 'elysian fields.' The organist was compensated, we understand, to the tune of \$2.50, 'those who danced paying the piper.'

That same summer a *Fete Champetre* sponsored by a local group called the Amphions received rave reviews. The Amphions used the 18th-century French term for a garden party to describe evening events planned for the Court House Square in Westminster and the following enthusiastic account was published:

The *Fete Champetre* of the Amphions was a great success. It is admitted to have been the finest entertainment ever gotten up in Westminster, and seems to have given the greatest amount of enjoyment. The [Court House] Grove was brilliantly illuminated with numerous gas jets and several hundred Chinese lanterns. A beautiful arch spanned the gateway, tastefully festooned with the American flag and surmounted by a star of gas jets. The numerous refreshment tables were decorated with bouquets of beautiful flowers, only surpassed in their loveliness by the living, breathing flowers, who presided over them with so much ease and grace, in their rich fancy costumes, which greatly heightened their charms. The array of beauty and fashion present was the admiration of every beholder. The brilliant illumination, the fancy costumes of the ladies, the gay throng of youth and beauty, embowered beneath the overspreading branches, the balmy atmosphere, and the exquisite music, presented altogether a scene of enchantment rarely ever surpassed.

The recent introduction of gas lighting in Westminster helped to create this event which also included "a pyrotechnic display of beautiful rockets" both evenings. The newspaper added, "The utmost propriety and good order prevailed, the enjoyment was unalloyed, and many expressed the wish that they might look upon the like again."

Mary Ann Ashcraft is a volunteer at the Historical Society of Carroll County.



Image 1

Credit: Courtesy of Historical Society of Carroll County.

Caption: Standing at the corner of East Main and Court streets, the Main Court Inn was demolished in the 1940s but had stood in Westminster for about 150 years. It was called "Wheeler's Hotel" in the 1870s when it was the site of a ball.

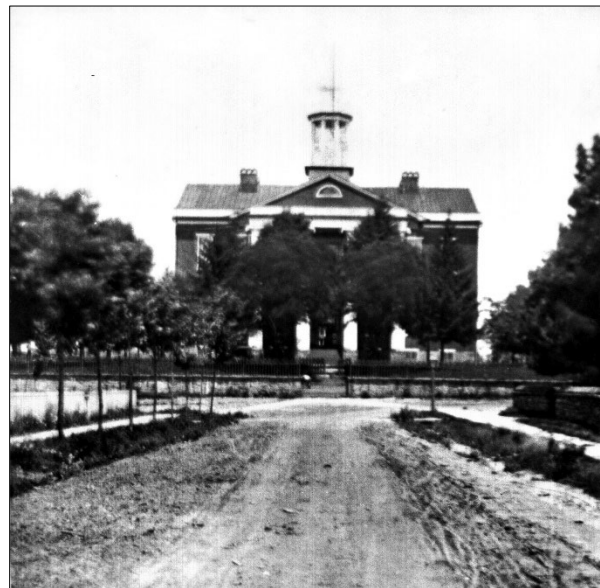


Image 2

Credit: Courtesy of Historical Society of Carroll County.

Caption: This early image of Carroll County's courthouse shows it as it would have looked during the 1870s period.

