

## "Westminster's New Post Office, Part 1"

Carroll County Times Article for 18 August 1996

By Jay A. Graybeal

During the last weeks of August 1934, Westminster residents awaited the opening of their new post office. At times it seemed as if the new building might never be completed. The interesting story was published in this newspaper of August 24, 1934:

The old story that "good things come to those who wait" is true, for travel where you will, a finer and more beautiful postoffice building will not be found. And when we say anywhere, we mean into cities as much as 100,000 population.

Now that the new building is about to open, it may be of interest to tell the story all over again. It is a long story running from April 1931, when the Government made final negotiations for the purchase of the site from the B. F. Shriver Co., to the present.

By an Act of Congress, appropriation was made for the erection of a number of postoffices throughout the country, and Westminster was named as one of them. The sum appropriated for the local building was \$120,000. On May, 1931, contractor Harry D. Ditman and his force of men began the demolition of the Shriver building, the Shriver office being moved to its present location along the Manchester road. In April, 1932, the Government awarded the contract to Quaker City Masonry Co., but they withdrew and the Brooklyn and Queens Screen Manufacturing Co., of Mitchell Field, Long Island accepted the contract for \$73,375. On Thursday, May 25, 1932, Joseph Alandar, a member of the Brooklyn Company, with Albert Ratzen, construction engineer, arrived on the job and surveys commenced. Frederick Burr, Engineer of the U. S. Treasury Department was assigned to the job.

The following day, with no special ceremony, Postmaster Harry M. Kimmey and Mayor George E. Matthews proceeded to the site and turned the first shovel of dirt. It was an extremely hot day, with the sun blazing down unmercifully, so not many shovels of dirt were turned. The week following actual excavations began.

In September the contraction firm was in receivership and the job laid idle for some time. Their bondsmen, the National Surety Co., of New York then assumed the responsibility of completing it. Robert C. Wadlie was the construction engineer for the new builders.

The sudden death of postmaster Harry M. Kimmey on September 12 came as a shock to the community. Mr., Kimmey was serving in his third term, having succeeded the late Dr. Thomas J. Coonan. On Saturday, October 15, Mr. Kimmey's wife, Mrs. Mary Test Kimmey was named acting postmaster to fill the unexpired term.

On Thursday, October 27, Frederick Burr, while returning to Washington crashed into a culvert near this city, resulting in fatal injuries. He died in Walter Reed Hospital, Washington, November 2. Lewis Newman was named to fill the vacancy.

Work had continued to a point that Wednesday, November 30 was named as the day to lay the corner stone. A parade formed at the forks and marched to the new building. The military, patriotic and civic organizations of the city participated. The actual ceremonies were in charge of the Grand Lodge of Masons of Maryland. Dr. A. N. Ward, President of Western Maryland College delivered the address.

The story of the cornerstone laying was carried, of course, in the local papers but also appeared in The Sun published in Baltimore:

Westminster, Md., Nov. 30--The cornerstone of the new \$67,000 postoffice building here was laid this afternoon.

Exercises included a parade headed by Mayor George E. Matthews and the Westminster Band, Members of the City Council, Junior Drum and Bugle Corps, Reserve Officers' Training Corps of Western Maryland College, members of Door-to-Virtue Lodge No. 46, of Masons and Grand Lodge members of the Masonic order.

Mayor Matthews presided over the program. After an opening address, he called on the Grand Lodge officers to conduct the service proper.

Then followed an impressive service conducted by Grand Master George W. Livingston, Deputy Grand Master Charles L. Zimmerman, Senior Grand Warden Harry B. Wright, Junior Grand Warden Mr. Gardner, Grand Chaplain the Rev. Dr. H. N. Bassler, Grand Marshal W. E. Robinson and Grand Director of Ceremonies Daniel Hope.

A copy of the Baltimore Sun was among the items in a box that was placed in the cornerstone by the grand treasurer, H. P. Gorsuch.

The principal address was made by Dr. A. Norman Ward, president of Western Maryland College. The Rev. Martin P. J. Egan pronounced the benediction.

Mrs. Harry M. Kimmey is the acting postmaster as the result of the vacancy caused by the death of her husband several months ago.

The building of Beaver Dam marble is expected to be ready for occupancy in the early spring.

Next week's column will include a list of the items placed in the cornerstone and a description of the completion and opening of the building.

Photo caption: Atlee B. Wampler (seated) and Charles Swartzbaugh posed with R. F. D. Wagon B behind the old Westminster Post Office at 39-41 E. Main St. in c. 1900. The new present post office building was completed in August 1934. Historical Society of Carroll County Collection, gift of Atlee W. Wampler, Jr., 1990.