

Carroll's historic sites represent "an embarrassment of riches" – April 28, 2024

Preservation of county history was extremely important to Helen Shriver Riley and Helen Arnold Gorman, two of Carroll's native daughters who recently passed away. Each of them devoted years of their long lives to the Historical Society of Carroll County, the Taneytown Heritage and Museum Association, the Union Mills Homestead, and other organizations devoted to saving Carroll's past.

Architectural historian Kenneth M. Short, who worked for the Carroll County Government in the 1990s as its historic planner, recently referred to Carroll's many historic sites as "an embarrassment of riches." Barns, churches, cemeteries, and homes, some dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, still dot our landscape, unlike what is happening in some neighboring counties where developers' bulldozers have wiped many of them away and substituted suburban sprawl.

To appreciate the settlement of Carroll County and how it came to have "an embarrassment of riches," you can check out the Tracey map on the Carroll County Genealogical Society's website. It is part of the Special Collections of the Maryland State Archives, but originally given to the Historical Society of Carroll County.

Hampstead historians Grace Tracey and her father, Dr. Arthur Tracey, produced a map which depicts Carroll's Indian trails, roads, and waterways, and identifies the land patents granted by Maryland's colonial government to individuals before 1756. Some of those first land owners were rich and some poor; some patents were for thousands of acres and others less than a hundred.

"Belt's Hills," patented in 1720 and located near Marriottsville, is the earliest tract on the map, but there are scores of others owned by 1756. Many tracts bear rather ordinary names such as "Meadow," or "Exchange." Other names probably reflect where the owner came from — "New Switzerland," "Tipperara" and "Belfast." My favorites are the colorful ones that leave you wondering what inspired them — "Petticoat's Hope," "Empty Cupboard," and "Bite Him Softly."

Owners or tenants quickly began occupying the tracts, erecting crude shelters at first for man and beast. The wealthy owners of huge tracts often lived in elegant style in Baltimore or Annapolis while renting portions of their tracts to tenants who paid a yearly rent.

Slowly but surely the original barns, churches, and homes built across Carroll County were replaced by ones reflecting greater economic success. Quite a few of these survive to this day. Perhaps you won't see them along major roads, but take detours down small lanes and dirt tracks on your Sunday drive through the countryside. There you'll find examples of the "embarrassment of riches" which Ken Short mentions and which he discovered while Carroll's historic planner.

Before Ken began work in 1991, at least two other people with backgrounds in architectural history were responsible for documenting Carroll's wealth of historic buildings. As early as 1970, R.J. Rivoire took a quick look at the Curfman Farm on Brick Church Road and left some

paperwork in the files of the Maryland Historical Trust. Although he didn't fully record what appeared to be a typical 19<sup>th</sup> century Carroll County farmhouse, Rivoire left behind a tantalizing note about the property — "May prove interesting archaeologically." Rivoire continued documenting other Carroll County buildings for several more years. Joe Getty also researched a number of local historic buildings before turning his attention to the law.

Nobody has systematically recorded Carroll's historic structures since 1999 when the county government stopped using grant money from the Maryland Historical Trust to cover the work of a historic planner. Many historic structures are still around, but they are slowly disappearing, even ones along some of our main streets. While it is impossible to physically save everything, carefully documenting buildings with sketches, floor plans, photographs, deed searches, and the like would, at the very least, allow us to know what existed once upon a time.

While working, Ken added the communities of New Windsor, Union Bridge, and McKinsty's Mills to the National Register of Historic Places. Having that prestigious status is financially helpful for anyone with an old property who lives within the National Register boundaries. The Curfman Farmhouse, though assigned a Carroll County number on the Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties, was never officially documented and was not part of a community on the National Register. Luckily, several people who recognized its importance made their own careful analysis of the house before it was recently demolished.

The Poulson-Englar Farm on Nicodemus Road, just a stone's throw from the Curfman property, was recorded for the Maryland Historical Trust in 1994. It had important ties to the early days of Methodism, but at that point was owned by a nearby quarry. Tenants occupied the house and the magnificent old barn stood empty. Today, thirty years later, the barn is gone and who knows what will protect the house from disappearing as well. Documentation of the Poulson property is available on the Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties (MIHP), part of the Maryland Historical Trust. To appreciate what it takes to "save" an historic site, even if only on paper, check the record for the Poulson-Englar property.

I feel certain that Helen Riley and Helen Gorman would second Ken Short's recent observation about historic preservation here in Carroll County: "If only there was a strong and well-funded group that could promote just the documentation and research of [historic properties], and disseminate that info, it would do a lot of good in making people realize what the county has and, over time, foster an ethic of preservation. Whether that should be the County government or some kind of non-profit, I don't know, but somebody needs to be doing it."

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

*Image 1: Submitted photo                      Caption: This 2021 photograph shows the final stages of demolition of the Curfman House which was built before 1800. Barely visible on the ground floor is the original wall decoration of a front room.*

*Image 2: Submitted photo                      Caption: The Bail(e)-Repp Farmhouse sits empty in a part of Carroll County which boasts several other historically important buildings.*