

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

"Westminster Fire Department Building"

Carroll County Times Article for 3 December 1895

By Jay A. Graybeal

I recently wrote about the how the Westminster Fire Department planned to move to new quarters in 1895. Plans for their new fire hall were announced in the November 30, 1895 issue of the Westminster American Sentinel newspaper.

The Westminster Fire Department is pushing the work for the speedy completion of the foundation of the new building to be erected for its use. The plan of the building, which was adopted at the regular monthly meeting on the 5th inst., is for a structure 40x70 feet, three stories, to be built of brick, with buff brick front and marble trimmings, and with a tower, for fire bell and town clock, 92 feet high. Under a portion of the building will be a cellar in which a heating apparatus will be located and which will also be a receptacle for coal.

On the first floor will be the engine, hose reel and hook and ladder truck room, with entrance to stairway leading to the upper floors. On the second floor the parlor, library, city council chamber and clerk's office will be located. The third floor will contain the meeting room, committee room, banquet hall and kitchen. A sketch of the building, from which a cut will be made, which we will be permitted to publish in the SENTINEL as soon as it shall have been completed, is being prepared by Mr. Jackson C. Gott, of Baltimore, the architect.

At the request of many citizens the department has consented to an arrangement which will enable it to give a more creditable front to the building than could have been afforded otherwise. The plan is the sale of bricks, in the front, to such citizens as may desire to have a part in the enterprise. Without this only a plain front could be given the structure, but with such liberality as may be surely reckoned upon, not only the front, but the bell tower, which will contain a town clock for which funds have been already subscribed by citizens, will be made ornamental and attractive. Mr. Harry E. Cootes has been commissioned and authorized to wait on all citizens, giving each an opportunity to pay for and have one brick-and as many more as may be desired-in the front of the building at a small stipulated price.

The department is anxious to do anything possible to gratify the wishes of citizens, and for that reason is erecting its building in such manner that a market and opera house may be added at any future time, without detriment to the present plan. But it draws the line where a possible debt might ensue, having experienced a burden of that sort for sixteen years, from which it is now happily free. At a recent meeting of the department the following members were unanimously selected as the building committee on the erection of the new house: Edwin J. Lawyer, Frank K. Herr, Denton S. Gehr, John M. Roberts and M. John Lynch.

Construction of the new hall began in the spring of 1896. While laying the cornerstone, the firemen inserted a bronze box as a time capsule. The box was removed in 1951 during a remodeling project and opened at the fire company meeting on July 11th. The event was described in the July 12, 1951 issue of the Hanover Sun newspaper.

A small bronze box, 6x3x4 inches, which had been removed from the cornerstone of the building of the Westminster Fire Engine and Hose Company, No. 1, during the present remodeling of the edifice, was opened at the monthly meeting of the company last evening at the Firemen's building. The structure

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had been built in 1896. The box had been placed in a pier in the former double door that was changed. It will be replaced in the upper pillar by the door next to the entrance.

Among the contents of the box was a copper plate bearing the names of E. J. Lawyer, D. S. Gehr, O. D. Gilbert, J. H. Brickner and F. T. Schaeffer. Newspapers in the box included a Baltimore American-Sunday, issued Feb. 2, 1896; a copy of the Democratic Advocate, issued April 11, 1896, and the April 11, 1896 issue of the American Sentinel. A piece of writing paper, badly aged, and presumably bearing the names of citizens, places of business and residences, fell to pieces when handled.

List of Association Managers

A list of members of the Veteran Volunteer Firemen's Association, reorganized in May, 1895, was included as follows: Frank K. Herr, president; Charles V. Wantz, first vice president; Oscar D. Gilbert, second vice president; Edwin J. Lawyer, treasurer; Denton S. Gehr, secretary; J. Clarence Mobley, engineer; John H. Mitten, marshall; standing committee, Frank K. Herr, Edwin J. Lawyer and Denton S. Gehr, and active members, John H. Mitten, Harry K. Schaeffer, Edwin J. Lawyer, Denton S. Gehr, Frank K. Herr, J. Clarence Mobley, William H. Schaeffer, Charles V. Wantz, Frederick M. Eckenrode and Oscar D. Gilbert. Meetings were held the first Wednesday in each month except January, which was on the third Wednesday, when the annual meeting and election of officers was held. Members of the Order American Firemen were Frank K. Herr, Edwin J. Lawyer, J. Clarence Mobley, Denton S. Gehr, William H. Schaeffer and Oscar D. Gilbert.

The Sun article also noted that the fire department traced its origin to the Union Fire Company founded in 1823. The Westminster Fire Engine and Hose Company, No. 1 was incorporated in 1879.

Photo Caption: The new Westminster Fire Department Building can be seen through the awning supports of a store on the opposite side of Main Street. Also visible in this turn-of-the century image are an unpaved street with stone gutters, a gas light pole with the top removed and several hitching posts. Plans for the new hall were announced in November 1895: the building was completed the following year. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of Mrs Roy Kendig.