

"Carroll County Court House"

Carroll County Times article for 29 November 1998

By Jay A. Graybeal

Carroll County's founding in 1837 required the construction of a Court House, Jail, and Alms House. The court house was to be the seat of the new county government and also where justice was dispensed. Prior to the construction of the new building, government met at the Westminster residence of Dr. William Willis, now 216 E. Main St.

The commissioners considered several sites for the new building but accepted Westminster tavern owner Isaac Shriver's donation of a three and one-quarter acre parcel, part of which was to be used for the new Court House. The land donation saved the county some money and was a good business move for Shriver as the site was conveniently located within walking distance of his tavern located on the corner of E. Main and Court Streets. Whenever government or court was in session, there was a greater need for meals and overnight accommodations.

Col. James M. Shellman, Sr., a Westminster attorney and the town's first mayor, designed the building. Col. Shellman prepared a conservative yet impressive Greek Revival plan to which a cupola and a two-story portico were soon added. The second floor portico porch is a typically Southern feature in Greek Revival architecture.

The county solicited competitive bids for the construction of the new court house. The bids ranged from \$11,325 to a low of \$9,800. Low bidder Conrad Moul was awarded the contract to construct the basic building which included "for carpenters work and finding materials": \$5,700; "for painting & plastering & finding materials": \$900; and "for brick & stone work & finding materials": \$3,200.

The cornerstone was laid with great ceremony on June 13, 1838. Andrew K. Shriver deposited a variety of objects in the cornerstone including documents related to the history of the county, contemporary paper and silver money, and newspapers. The late Judge Francis Neal Parke wrote of the event:

"THE LAYING OF THE CORNER STONE OF THE COURT HOUSE

This is a continuation of Judge F. N. Parke's talk that is explained in the previous New Letter.

The Commissioners on January 3, 1838, fixed the spot on which the foundation of the Court House was to be laid, and by June 13th, 1838, the corner stone was ready to be placed. It was made the occasion for a celebration. According to the accounts of the local newspapers of that day, it was a brilliant affair. In preparation for its participation in the festivities the Warren Rifle Company of Hanover, Pennsylvania, under the command of Captain Skinner and Lieutenants Trone and Faber, marched to Manchester and encamped there for the night of June 12th. The next morning the company took up its march to Westminster headed by the Manchester Military Band under the leadership of Captain Jacob Frankforter. When they reached Westminster they were met by the Westminster Riflemen, under the command of Captain J. K. Longwell, and were escorted to the old Baltimore Turnpike where they were joined by the Finksburg Rifle Corps under the command of Captain Bramwell. The four companies then marched through Westminster to the Taneytown Road to await the coming of the Taneytown Guards led by Captain Samuel Swope. After this union of the five companies the procession formed under the leadership of Major General William Jamison, and the following staff and prominent citizens: Colonels James C. Atlee, Samuel Galt, Thomas Hook, James M. Shellman and Joshua C. Gist; and Adjutant Jacob

Pouder, Jr., Captains William Houck and Solomon Myerly; Messrs. Ignatius Gore, Nicholas Kelly, Jacob Grove, Benjamin Yingling and Andrew K. Shriver.

The five military units were next in line followed by the Civic bodies: Committee of Arrangements - The Reverend Clergy; The Gentlemen to lay the Corner Stone - The Orator of the Day - Judges of the Circuit Court - Clerk, Deputies and Crier - Sheriff and Deputies - Attorneys at Law - Commissioners of Tax and Clerk - Judges of the Orphans' Court - Register of Wills - Member of the Legislature - Members of Congress - Strangers - Citizens in Sections of Four.

The line of march was from the north end of town to the extreme south end, then counter-marching and returning to Court Street where the court house was to be erected. The parade marched around the foundation forming a circle. Chief Marshall Jamison then announced the following program: Music by the Band - Prayer by Rev. Josiah Varden of the Methodist Protestant Church - The laying of the corner stone by Andrew Shriver, assisted by Dr. William Willis, Chairman of Arrangements - Music by the Band - Oration by Samuel D. Lecompte, Esq. Music by the Band - The military to form Battalion under Colonel Thomas Hook and perform military evolutions - Procession Dismissed."

While Conrad Moul was constructing the basic building, the Commissioners were considering some additional architectural features. On August 16, they approved an expenditure of up to \$700 for a cupola and on September 5, they approved a portico. Contractor Moul was awarded the contract for the cupola and portico. A dispute arose as to the amount Moul was to be paid on his contract and the matter ended up in court. Moul was represented by Col. James M. Shellman and the Commissioners by William P. Maulsby and Madison Nelson. The Howard County court ruled against the county and awarded Moul \$1,000 plus interest and costs.

The basic courthouse plan remained unchanged until symmetrical one-story east and west wings designed by Thomas Dixon were added in 1882. Architects Rigger, Buckler and Fenhagen prepared plans to enlarge the wings by one-half stories in 1935. After more than a century and a half, some local cases are still tried in the court house and the structure dominates the historic Court Square.

Photo caption: The Carroll County Court House was painted white when photographed in the 1950s. Historical Society of Carroll County collection.