

## "The Death of Nicholas Paroway"

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By Jay A. Graybeal

When Nicholas Paroway (Paraway) of Westminster died on December 8, 1876 he had reached the remarkable age of 110 years! His obituary in the December 16th issue of the Westminster American Sentinel newspaper reflected his unique place in the community:

"There seemed to be a fitness as to the time and the season in which death should claim this old man from out the community where the Spring, Summer, Autumn and at last the Winter of his life was spent. Ten years ago it was permitted him to enjoy that which was denied our nation until a decade thereafter-the Centennial Anniversary of his birth! One hundred and ten years old! Thirty years longer than allotted to man by the Psalmist, and carrying us back to a period of time ante-dating the birth of the first Napoleon; nevertheless, testimony, almost absolutely conclusive, can be produced showing that Nicholas Paroway, who died in Westminster on the 8th inst. was in fact one hundred and ten years of age. He was born in Baltimore county, and maintained nearly to the last, a very distinct recollection of the stirring scenes that marked the city's connection with the Revolutionary struggle. When the Declaration of Independence was signed, he was a boy, ten years of age, an attendant on his master's table. About this time, and running through a period of several years, (for of dates he knew nothing) he recalls to mind the report of the coming of foreign troops to America to assist our people; the passing through Baltimore sometime afterward of large numbers of strangely uniformed soldiers (evidently the French.) He remembered handing water to the officers who it seems were generally well cared for by his master. Not long after this, he says, peace was announced, and the event was appropriately celebrated in the city. "The biggest loomation I ever saw!" remarked the old man. During the war of 1812-15, 'old Nick' lived first with the Holmes family and afterwards with Ludwig Wampler, on the mill property East of our city. Jacob Holmes who died in August 1872, seventy-six years of age, asserted frequently that Nick was an old man when he (Holmes) was a boy, and that his parents said that Nick was thirty years older than he was. The age question was a subject at that time of frequent discussion. It was in the midst of war and drafts were as common then as during the Southern Rebellion in more recent years. The British advance on Baltimore occurred during his service with Ludwig Wampler. Two of his sons (one of them Lewis, father of John T. Wampler of this city) true to their patriotic instincts went to meet the invader. The attachment of old Nicholas for the boys induced him to ask consent of the senior Wampler to follow them and share their perils. "Tut, tut!" said old Ludwig, "what do they want with such an old fellow as you?" His mind was richly, though somewhat crudely stored with a recollection of the events of that era of our history, "The Bladensburg Races," an amusing topic with him, contained a mine of valuable information. For many years he has been one of the fixtures of our city-so long that the memory of the present generation knoweth not its beginning. One of the first buildings on Union St., (a thoroughfare opened under the administration of our first Republican Mayor, the late Dr. Swormstedt) was that of "old Nick's." It was an humble dwelling to the erection of which his friends, upon whom "Nick" always had a just claim, cheerfully contributed. When enfranchisement came, in deference to his age, he was the first one of his color to register as a voter in the district, and jealous and proud of the privilege he has voted at every election since. His last ballot was cast for Hayes and Wheeler. On this occasion, as has been the case for a number of years, he was hauled to the polls in a carriage furnished by his Republican friends. In the grand political demonstration of the Republicans in 1872, "old Nick" was one of the prominent features. Seated in an open vehicle, driven by one of his race, at least seventy-five years his junior, the old man looked out upon the throng, and pointed with pride to the placard on his hat that announced in conspicuous capitals "One Hundred and Six years old and not for Greeley." He was

married twice. His second wife, "Aunt Gracy," perhaps eighty years of age, survives him. One of his sons met his death in defence of his country under Butler, on the James river near Richmond. Both white and colored exerted themselves in paying a proper respect to this remains and memory. Few of our dead have had a handsomer casket, and none certainly whose death occasioned more comment than that of "old Uncle Nick's."

Paroway's obituary was highly unusual for the time. Prior to the 1880s only the most prominent local citizens were remembered with an obituary; in most only cases only a few lines appeared in a column entitled, "DEATHS". Next week's column will present a memorial poem for Paroway written by Mary B. Shellman of Westminster.

Photo caption: Although no image of Nicholas Paroway survives, this late 1860s photograph of Westminster's East Main St. at the railroad crossing shows the streets he knew in the last decade of his long life. Historical Society of Carroll County Collection.