

"Westminster Businessmen Unite"

Carroll County Times Article for 26 April 1998

By Jay A. Graybeal

The second Westminster Train station was a nearly new building in the spring of 1898 when local business men perceived the railroad as an indirect threat to their livelihoods. The April 9, 1898 issue of the Westminster Democratic Advocate newspaper described the formation of a new association aimed at protecting their interests:

"FOR MUTUAL PROTECTION.

The Merchants and Other Business Men of Westminster Organize.

Business Men of Other Towns Asked to Form Similar Associations.

The organization of the retail merchants of Baltimore for the purpose of increasing their trade, and their successful efforts in inducing the Western Maryland Railroad Company to run frequent excursion trains over their main line and branches to Baltimore, has aroused the business men of Westminster to a consideration of means of protecting their trade. The action of the retailers of Baltimore is recognized as a legitimate one for their own interests, but this competition must be met, and for the purpose of organization and action a meeting of the merchants and other business men was held in the Babylon Building on Wednesday night. For temporary officers, Geo. W. Albaugh was called to preside and Chas. H. Vanderford was chosen secretary.

After some discussion of the action of the retailers of Baltimore, in which there was unanimity of sentiment for organization and action, Fred D. Miller offered the following preamble and resolutions, which were adopted:

"WHEREAS, the business of retail merchants on the line of the Western Maryland Railroad is threatened by the concentration of the retail trade in Baltimore by reason of frequent excursions trains, at low fares, to that city, therefore be it

"Resolved, that an association be formed, to be called the Retailers' Association of Westminster, Maryland, for the purpose of the development and growth of the city and for mutual protection in the maintenance of the business interest of the community.

"Resolved, further, that the retail merchants and business men of other cities and towns along the line of the Western Maryland railroad and its branches be requested to form similar organizations for like purposes, and appoint committees to act with committees of other associations, so that united and proper efforts can be made to carry out the objects of the organizations."

The meeting voted to form an association to be known as the "Retailers Association of Westminster, Maryland," with the objects and purposes as expressed in the first resolution, and elected permanent officers as follows:

Fred. D. Miller, President; Wm. F. Derr, Vice-President; Elmer C. Orndorff, Secretary and A. C. Strasburger, Treasurer.

Geo. W. Albaugh and Joseph W. Smith were selected, the former for the East End and the latter for the West End, to wait upon the business men of the city and get all to sign the roll of membership. They performed their duties on Thursday, and met with a unanimous response.

The President, by a unanimous vote, was instructed to communicate with the business men of every city and town along the line of the Western Maryland Railroad and its branches, and urge the formation of similar associations to this one and secure their cooperation so that united and formidable action can be taken for the protection of the retail trade of all the towns and cities.

The Retailers Association will meet at the Babylon Building at 7:30 next Monday night, and the Association invites also the members of the Merchants and m

Manufacturers Association to be present also. Let the attendance be large and prompt at the hour named.

What action the combined organizations will take will be a matter for the determination of the representatives of the various associations when they meet. The feeling among the merchants here is that a protest should be made to the officers of the Western Maryland Railroad Company against the running of frequent excursion trains to Baltimore over their lines at low fares for the round trip. It can be easily demonstrated to the railroad company that in doing this they are jeopardizing their own interests for the low fares will not result in much gain, and they may lose freight at points, where competition is possible, as at Hanover, Littlestown, Gettysburg, York, Hagerstown and Chambersburg. The feeling here, too, is that the wholesale merchant of Baltimore have an interest in this movement, for if Baltimore is to persist in an endeavor to monopolize the retail trade of a large part of the state that retailers of the section affected by the cheap and frequent excursions may retaliate on the city by dealing elsewhere. Three fourths of the goods sold in Westminster are now bought of the wholesale merchants of Baltimore, and the loss of a million dollars of trade from one point alone is matter to enlist the interest of the Baltimore wholesalers and manufacturers.

The people is general along the line of the Western Maryland Railroad should decline to purchase their supplies in Baltimore, except such as cannot be bought at home. Every dollar spent away from home is that much drain upon the resources of the community. Speaking of Westminster only, goods can be bought as cheaply here as in Baltimore, and the stocks are large and varied. Competition is always in order and desirable, but the attempt of the Baltimore retailers at monopoly, seconded by the efforts of the railroad lines, should be cut off by a refusal of the people to aid in the monopoly. Three excursions are to be run over the Western Maryland railroad and its branches next week and excursions have also been arranged over the Baltimore and Eastern Shore road, from Ocean City, the furthestmost part of the Eastern Shore. Live and let live should be the motto of all people, but the retailers of Baltimore are now acting upon the principle of let us live if all the balance of the business men go to the wall."

Despite the dire predictions, Westminster's business men did not "go to the wall." Instead they prospered in the early twentieth century as evidenced by the commercial buildings on Main St., and the handsome homes erected by the merchant class.

Photo caption: Frederick Daniel Miller (left) was elected president of the Retailers Association of Westminster, Maryland in April 1898. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of Harry Emigh, Jr., 1991.

