

A shout out to all who bring Carroll County history to life

Carroll County has nurtured my love of history since my family and I arrived here from Oregon over half a century ago. I am grateful to all the institutions and individuals who shared bits of history which this paper published as “Carroll Yesteryears.”

My serious involvement in Carroll’s history lay dormant while raising two children, but took off with the founding of the Carroll County Genealogical Society in 1981. We original members of that organization tapped the rich resources available in the library of the Historical Society of Carroll County and elsewhere. Soon both institutions began publishing lots of local history – church records, marriage records, an atlas, a research guide, cemetery records, etc. In 1990, Joe Getty started submitting “Yesteryears” articles to this newspaper on a regular basis. Jay Graybeal took up the mantle when he replaced Joe as Director of the Historical Society. Both of them inspired me with their knowledge of history and ability to make it thoroughly enjoyable.

Meanwhile, other towns around the County were exploring and celebrating their own heritage – establishing small museums, offering lectures and walking tours, publishing books, and otherwise engaging their citizens. The County hired architectural historian Ken Short in the 1990s to document its historic buildings. Ken and Peter Pearre made a great team when it came to promoting architecture, historic preservation, and documenting the history of Union Bridge and other communities along the western edge of the county.

After retiring in 2002, I had the good fortune to join the Historical Society’s cadre of volunteers working in its musty, crowded basement library. George Horvath was one of them; Helen Gorman was another. Then there were Don Riley and Sue Bundy. Occasionally out-of-town researchers like Jeff Duvall stopped in to explore the Society’s collection of manuscripts, old newspapers, photographs, and such. Each volunteer had a specialty and knew his or her area of the county like the back of his hand. Helen Gorman never mastered using a computer, but she knew every book on the shelves and every building in Taneytown. George created amazing maps and could sniff out long-lost cemeteries buried in ancient deeds. Sue was a wizard at finding someone’s missing ancestor. Research by Don Riley, and later by his son, Sam, brought life to some of Carroll’s earliest families and industries. Jeff Duvall, working from his home in Georgia, still solves puzzles involving old land records and makes valuable contributions to the Genealogical Society.

Although Jim Purman, Johnny Johnsson, Jonathan Herman, and Ann Horvath were not part of that Historical Society library group, each of them has left his or her mark on the history of the Sykesville/Eldersburg area in one way or another. Ann shares the research she and George did for more than four decades and continues her involvement in the Genealogical Society. Johnny shares his knowledge of local geology through field trips and lectures. While he was alive, Jim Purman’s enthusiasm for history in any form was infectious, and Jonathan’s name will always be synonymous with Sykesville history.

New Windsor owes much to Frank Batavick, Jeanne Laudermilch, and Sam and Doris Pierce for their work in establishing its history museum. I remember calling Mike Eacho with questions about bygone days in Mt. Airy. Each year a team of volunteers from the Taneytown Heritage and Museum Association offers splendid exhibits incorporating the town's history. Getting to know all these people and the organizations they represented made it easy to find interesting topics for the Carroll Yesteryears columns.

One other institution should not be overlooked for its contributions to local history – the Pipe Creek Civil War Round Table. For each of the last 27 years it has brought speakers, musicians, re-enactors, and craftspeople to Carroll County to commemorate our own Civil War experience – Corbit's Charge – on the last weekend in June. Few subjects attract more attention in newspapers than stories about the Civil War.

Thanks go to Ron Kuehne, David Bloom, Steve Carney, Sherry Hartman and other members of the PCCWRT who continue to bring the Civil War period to life. Many thanks also to Cathy Baty, former curator at the Historical Society, for the new edition of Frederic Shriver Klein's "Just South of Gettysburg."

It's impossible to remember all of those who contributed to the "Yesteryears" columns in some way, shape, or form over many years. Our articles covered just about everything but the kitchen sink. Well. . .one article did pay homage to Adam Shower's 9-plate iron stove made in a Manchester (MD) foundry!

The final column for 2024 will appear December 29th. It's an exciting story of a young Taneytown militiaman who marched through ice and snow to join George Washington and the Continental Army in 1777. You'll enjoy it.

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Image 1: Submitted image Caption: Visitors doing research at the Historical Society of Carroll County's library, 210 East Main St., Westminster.

Image 2: Submitted image Caption: George Horvath delivering an unused gravestone carved by Sebastian "Boss" Hammond to the Historical Society. It was found at the site of Hammond's workshop.

Image 3: Submitted image Caption: Members of the Pipe Creek Civil War Round Table standing behind the graves of Civil War soldiers buried in Mary Shellman's lot at Westminster Cemetery between 1863 and 1907.

