

"Memorial Day in 1900"

Carroll County Times article for 28 May 2000

By Jay A. Graybeal

Although Westminster is justly proud of its long tradition of Memorial Day observances, the holiday has been observed in other Carroll County towns since shortly after the Civil War. The first observances of the twentieth century were reported in the June 2, 1900 issue of the Westminster American Sentinel newspaper under the headline of Memorial Day in Carroll:

"Memorial exercises were held at Winfield and Taneytown, this county, on Wednesday. An account of the day at Winfield will be found in the items from that place, elsewhere published in the SENTINEL. To this account we only desire to add that admirable order prevailed, notwithstanding the great throng in attendance, which was estimated at about six thousand people, and that the speakers on the occasion were much impressed by the intelligence of the vast auditory, all of whom listened with marked attention and interest to the address.

At Taneytown the demonstration far surpassed any previous memorial occasion. It included a parade in which the old soldiers, Carroll county military company of Frizellburg, school children, Taneytown Fire Company, the Order of Heptasophs, Patriotic Sons of America and Knights of Pythias were in line. The several cemeteries of the town were visited and the graves of the deceased soldiers decorated with flowers. The military company fired a salute in each cemetery. A meeting was held in the Opera House, at which about seven hundred people were present, and as many more failed to find standing room. Addresses were delivered by Rev. Father Lennan, of St. Joseph's Catholic Church, and Rev. Chas. A. Britt, of Trinity Lutheran Church, Taneytown. The exercises were opened with prayer by Rev. Father Lennan."

The same paper also carried the story about the observances in Winfield under the headline of Winfield Items:

Memorial Day is over and the success of the past has been duplicated. The day was pleasant though the weather in the morning was threatening. Perhaps the crowd was as large as was ever assembled there, which means that the numbers reached the thousands. Memorial Day has become a feature for Carroll county in the Winfield celebration, and we believe the reason is largely, because the committee in charge has always promised big things and has kept its word. Any speaker, even though he by of national repute, could consider it an honor to appear before the large and intelligent audiences which collect there. The entire program was a success. The music by the band was enjoyed by the large crowd, while the vocal music was said to have been very fine. Prof. Geo. W. Hess deserves the credit for the choir's success. Mr. W. H. Thomas, of Westminster, made the first address on the 'Equality of Men,' which was thoroughly enjoyed. Hon. Jno. V. L. Findlay gave a brilliant talk and upheld all his previous state and national honors, while Dr. J. W. C. Cuddy, the soldier orator, pleased with his beautiful language the large audience. To those who know him, his look and manner were similar to the great orator Col. Geo. W. Baine, of Kentucky. Rev. A. F. Campbell was at his best. His oration from first to last was a series of climaxes, which were warmly applauded. Commander Conaway and Comrades Easton and Zile as well as all those who helped make the affair a success should feel proud of the day's work. The ladies of the W.R.C. deserve a great deal of praise for the excellent dinner which they gave all those who took part. Rev. H. L. Shipley was master of ceremonies."

Memorial Day in 1900 was also a time to think about the needs of living veterans, many of whom were suffering from the effects of their service or from old age. As reported in the American Sentinel, Westminster area veterans heard an encouraging sermon on the eve of Memorial Day:

"The members of Burns Post No. 13, G.A.R., of this city, attended divine service at Centenary M. E. Church, on Sunday morning last, and heard an exceedingly appropriate sermon by the pastor, Rev. Dr. Job A. Price. Dr. Price related many interesting incidents of war times, and expressed emphatic views in relation to many of the questions growing out of the great struggle between the sections. He declared, in a positive manner, his conviction that every soldier who fought for the country, whether wounded or disabled, or not, should be given a pension. The veterans were very much pleased with the discourse. On Sunday afternoon the post, under command of John M. Reese, visited Westminster Cemetery and other burial places in this city, and decorated the graves of deceased soldiers with flowers. At Westminster Cemetery the memorial ritual of the G.A.R. was performed and Col. Wm. A. McKellip read Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address."

Photo caption: A group of patriotic Winfield boys posed with American flags and musical instruments at the turn of the century. The South Carroll community sponsored a large observance of Memorial Day in 1900. Historical Society of Carroll County, gift of Miss Stella Shipley.