

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

A Countian's Tour of the Holy Lands in 1900, Part II
Carroll County Times article for 9 September 1990
by Jay A. Graybeal

George W. Yeiser left Egypt in mid-March 1900. He completed his tour of the Middle East by visiting the Holy Land, Palestine and Syria. Yeiser observed the tensions that existed between Arab and Jew over access to holy sites in Jerusalem. The geography of this region has greatly changed since Yeiser's visit. Palestine is now the State of Israel and part of Syria is now Lebanon.

"BEYROUT, SYRIA, April 14, 1900

DEAR READERS: - Thirty-one days ago our party landed at Jaffa, Palestine, fifty miles from Jerusalem. Only thirty days are required to see Palestine and Syria. Jaffa has always held an important place in the history of the 'Holy Land,' because it is the only seaport Jerusalem has. Here King Hiram delivered the cedar that was carried overland to build Solomon's Temple. The first house that our party was shown here was that of Simon, the tanner, where Saint Peter boarded at one time. Next we were taken through the orange and lemon groves around the town. The trees here grow nearly as large as apple trees in Carroll, and the largest and finest quality of oranges and lemons grow here in the world. At this season the trees are covered with this delicious golden fruit.

From Jaffa we go by train to Jerusalem drawn by an American engine. We enter the city through the Jaffa gate. When we remember that Christ passed through this gate, the conquests that took place here, the prophecies that were foretold and fulfilled against the city, a tourist feels that he surely stands on 'Holy Ground.'

Jerusalem has a wall around it about 35 feet high, but about half the present city is outside the wall.

Nothing impresses a traveler in Egypt and Palestine more than the real proof before him, in every step he takes, that customs here never change, in prosperity or adversity, in a high form of government or in a government like the present. Society, costume, and manufacture and agriculture are the same today as they were 4,000 years ago. Let us see if our observations will establish this fact?

Twenty-two miles south of Jerusalem is Hebron, as old as Damascus, and once the home of Abraham, Jacob and also King David. This is the vicinity of Eschol, where the spies secured the large cluster of grapes and returned to Moses 3500 years ago. The finest vineyards I saw in all Palestine are in this vicinity, and the largest and finest grapes in the world are grown here today.

At Bethlehem, six miles south of Jerusalem, we were shown the traditional spot where Christ was born. Here our party read the story of His birth and sang 'Joy to the World'.

Across from Bethlehem is the hill where shepherds were abiding, keeping watch over their flock by night, 2000 years ago. All over the hill shepherds are still keeping watch over their flocks, and several sheep folds are near the place.

From Bethany, where that beautiful, humble home of Mary and Martha was, and where the Master was such a welcome guest, the road is cut through rocks over the Mount of Olives. From here is the best view of the city, and from here Christ wept over the city. All along the road are lepers almost falling to pieces crying in loud voices for 'backsheesh' just as they did when Christ passed by on his triumphal march into the city.

From Bethany to Jericho, a distance of twenty miles, the road leads through to the hills and mountains of Judea. In all this distance not a habitation is seen. Midway along the road is the Inn of the good Samaritan. Here soldiers are constantly on duty to protect travelers and tourists while they lunch. Every shepherd on the hill and every donkey and camel driver on the road has a gun strapped on his back. This shows that robbery is committed in this community. It illustrates the Parable of the good Samaritan which occurred along this road.

Our tents are pitched on the site of the Jericho where Christ healed the blind man. From here we pass over the beautiful plain of Jericho to the Dead Sea, thence up the river Jordan to the fording and return by the site of Ancient Gilgal to the tents, a total distance of twenty miles.

Throughout this beautiful fertile valley, which was once covered with humanity, villages and cities, not a sign of habitation is seen. Not even a native was seen in our whole day's journey. Nothing remains of Jericho and Ancient Gilgal. A native mud village, where man and beast abide under the same shelter, on the site of Jericho, is all the population a tourist finds in this valley.

Two miles north of our tents is the site of Jericho, of the time of Joshua. Twenty feet below the surface are ruins of the city wall. This is all that remains. Elisha's fountain flows from near the city wall. The water that the prophet sweetened 2900 years ago is still sweet.

In the city we visit the Mosque of Omar, which covers the site of Solomon's temple, the church of the 'Holy Sepulchre,' the Pool of Bethesda, Solomon's quarries, Solomon's stable, etc.

On Friday afternoon we go to the wailing place of the Jews. A short explanation may not be out of place here. The site of Solomon's temple is surrounded by the city wall on the South, East and North. A wall 35 feet high also separates the city from the temple. It requires a special permit to get inside of this wall. We sinners can only enter the Mosque by putting extra slippers over our shoes, so that the temple is not defiled. But the poor Jew can get no permit to get inside of this wall. He is too defiled in the sight of the Turk. Thousands of Jews are born and die within a few hundred yards of the sacred rock upon which Abraham offered Isaac and which covered the 'Holy of Holies' in Solomon's temple, but are never permitted to see it. Therefore the Jews go to the wall that separates the temple from the city and pray and sing, and shed tears, that God may hasten the time when the Jews may return to the 'rock' and establish their worship. This wall is really being kissed away by those devout worshipers. Their prayers, however, will never admit them within the wall. But there are other prayers and influences that will shortly drive heathenism from the 'Holy rock' and establish in Jerusalem a true worship of the true and living God.

In Jerusalem is a large German Lutheran Church. Back of the altar is the inscription, 'Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever.' There is also an English Protestant Church here, an English

mission to promote christianity among the Jews, a Christian Alliance, a Young Men's Christian Association, A Jewish Christian Association, an American Mission, an American school and church. All around the city are the Christian Jews building beautiful mansions and taking active part in restoring the city. These are the influences and prayers that will accomplish a great deal.

On Sunday, March 25th, at 4 p.m., our party held a prayer meeting on Gordon's Calvary. About fifty of our members were present. Selah Merrill, American Consul at Jerusalem, led in prayer. More than 150 Jews and missionaries took part in the service.

From Jerusalem fifty of our members went on horseback on a camping tour to Beyrout, a distance of 250 miles. The balance of the party went back to Jaffa and sailed to Beyrout and met the camping company at Damascus.

The following is our camping outfit: - One conductor, two dragomen, three assistants, four cooks, twelve waiters, fourteen horsemen, forty-four muleteers, twenty dwelling tents, two kitchen tents, twenty-nine horses, sixty-one mules, ten donkeys, and a number of old Bedouins with old rusty guns and spears with handles twenty feet long to protect us against robbers. For these courtesies the Sultan already collected three times from us for Passports, and I am informed we will be called upon two times more before we can pass through Constantinople. In going from Jerusalem to Beyrout our party passed the following interesting places: Mizpeh, which Samuel called Ebenezer; Bethel, where Jacob had his dream, and Hanna lived when she went to the temple at Shilo to pray; Shilo, where Eli and Samuel were high priests; here the Philistines also captured the Ark of the Covenant; Jacob's well; Joseph's tomb; Shechem, once the home of Abraham and also Jacob; Samaria, with its extensive ruins of Ahab's temple; Ahab's palace, and Herod's amphitheatre; (here Herod had his court in Galilee in the time of Christ;) Dothan, where Joseph was sold and where the King of Syria sent his soldiers to capture the prophet Jezreel where Ahab's summer residence stood, and the sad story of Naboth's vineyard is well known; Shunem, where the Shunemite women gave the prophet a room on top of the wall; Nain, where Christ raised the widow's son; Endor, where Saul sought council from the witch; the native home of 'The Son of Man;' Cana, where Christ turned water into wine; the Sea of Galilee; the site of Bethsaida; the site of Capernium; Carsarea Phillippi, with its extensive ruins; Damascus, the oldest city in the world, with its street called Strait, its narrow arched streets and its thousands of dogs and pet sheep; here ladies lead pet lambs instead of pug dogs; here nearly every 'Mary has a little lamb, with fleece as white as snow.' After leaving Damascus we passed through the most beautiful valley I saw thus far, lying between two snowcapped peaks. It is called the paradise of Syria. In this valley are the ruins of Baalbeck, the most extensive in the world. Now pyramids and ruins of Egypt take off your hats and bow to Asyrian idolatry. The largest temple here is nearly 1000 feet long and 600 feet wide. Space will not permit me to describe these large ruins in full, will only refer to a few; - The courts of the Sun and Baal are fifty feet above the foundation, or in the second story. From this height a number of columns are still standing 27 feet in circumference and 70 feet high. On top of these columns (120 feet above the foundation) are marble plates 15 to 20 feet long and 12 feet square. There were 96 of these columns in these two courts alone. In the outside wall, 20 feet above the surface, are stones 64 feet long and fourteen feet square. These stones dumfounded me. I will report no more ruins until I see something to beat this.

For nearly two months I traveled in countries where nations are buried and their cities lie in ruins and no one to possess them. This made a deep impression upon me, but that which impresses a tourist

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

more than all these wonderful works of a destroyed people is the wonderful work the missionary is doing in this dark county. Wherever the Light of the Gospel reaches a family there is sunshine, happiness and cleanliness. A tourist can point out every child as he travels through Palestine and Syria that is born of a Christian mother.

This is my last letter, dear readers. I will visit Smyrna, Ephesus, Constantinople, Athens, Mt. Vesuvius, Pompeii, Rome and other cities in Europe, and will sail for America from Paris. I rejoice that I am an American citizen. Truly,

GEORGE W. YEISER.'