

## *Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles*

"Christmas at the Alms House in 1895"

Carroll County Times article for 17 December 1995

By Jay A. Graybeal

When Carroll County was formed in 1837, the new county was required to erect several public buildings including a court house, jail and an alms house. The latter structure was completed in 1852 and served as the "county home" for local residents who were unable to care for themselves. The county operated the Alms House until the early 1960s when changes in social welfare services rendered the facility obsolete. The former alms house became the Carroll County Farm Museum in 1965.

A century ago, local residents assisted their less fortunate neighbors at the Alms house by providing a special Christmas program and gifts for the forty-two "inmates." The event was chronicled by Mary B. Shellman and published in the Westminster Democratic Advocate newspaper of January 11, 1896.

Through the efforts of a few ladies, aided by generous contributions from a number of the citizens and merchants of Westminster, Christmas brought more than its usual share of joy and brightness to the inmates of our County Alms House, and they were made to feel that the song the Angels sang, of "Peace on Earth, good will to men," had a meaning for even them, dependent though they must be upon the bounty of others during the remaining days of their lives. On Christmas Day the Steward, Mr. Hahn, served to them a dinner of turkey, with its accompaniments, and on the day following, the treat, which had been prepared for them by the ladies' committee, was given them, thus making two bright and happy days to be remembered in Christmas week of 1895. The committee were Miss Mary B. Shellman chairman, Mrs. Charles Billingslea, Misses Alice Huber, Nannie Rinker, Nannie Galt and Lillie Woodward. These ladies enlisted Mrs. John L. Reifsnider and Miss Sallie Roop as assistants, who rendered valuable aid in preparing and distributing the numerous packages. The young men of the College Christian Association, who conduct the Sunday afternoon services, were absent on their vacation, so were unable to be present. Mr. Jacob Thomson kindly conveyed the committee, with their numerous packages, to and from the Alms House, and at the appointed hour, 2 p.m., they found nearly all of the forty-two inmates neat and clean, patiently waiting for them in the large dining-room, where the following program was rendered, a number of ladies from Westminster being present and assisting in the singing: Carol, "It came upon the midnight clear;" prayer, Rev. Joel Brown, pastor Centenary M. E. Church; carol, "Silent Night, Holy Night," reading, Miss Kittie Noel; carol, "Wonderful Night;" readings, Misses Louise Reifsnider and Elizabeth Sterling; vocal duet, "Carol, Brother, Carol," Misses Ida and Maggie Lockard; reading, by Miss Lillie Woodward, of an original poem written by Miss Mary B. Shellman; address, Rev. Evan Edwards; carol, "The Morn in Beauty Breaketh;" benediction, Rev. A. D. Melvin, pastor of M. P. Church.

At the close of this program, another of a different nature, but perhaps more attractive to some, was given. This consisted of the distribution of gifts, every one receiving something—those who could read, neatly bound Bibles, and the sick and infirm, soft cushions for their chairs, and baskets of temptingly arranged fruit. The wishes of all had been carefully considered and gratified as far as possible, under the guidance of the ladies of the committee, and Misses Grace Gorsuch, Mattie Hook and Carrie Horner, of the Sunday afternoon choir; the children present, Misses Rosie, Esther and Hazel Hahn, Louise Reifsnider, Elizabeth Sterling, Caroline and Sue Billingslea, served as gift bearers, and added to the value of the gifts with their bright smiles and pleasant greeting. In addition to their gifts, each received a generous package of cake, nuts, fruit and confectionery. Every room was visited, and in each a Christmas token was left to gladden the inmates. The thanks of the committee are heartily given to the following

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persons who aided so greatly with their contributions; Cash donations Mrs. J. K. Longwell, Mrs. W. P. Maulsby, Mrs. Sallie Crout, Miss Kittie Noel, Mr. David Stoner, Mr. John Burt, Mr. C. Stoner, Mr. N. I. Gorsuch, Mr. C. C. Gorsuch, J. A. C. Bond, Esq., Mr. Wm. Struth, and a friend through Mrs. Charles Billingslea, Westminster, and Mrs. James H. Frazer, Baltimore; confectionery, Messrs., G. W. Morningstar, W. T. Wilson, D. A. Farrer, E. O. Grimes, John J. Reese and J. Shreeve; fruit and nuts, Mr. W. Keefer; fruit Messrs. W. and L. Brach, Prof. and Mrs. McDaniel, Mrs. D. A. Shipley, Misses Nannie Galt and Lillie Woodward; cake, Mrs. T. H. Lewis, Mrs. John L. Reifsnider, Miss Katie Smith, Miss Amanda Murray, Mrs. Eliza Shreeve, Miss Ida Lockard, Mrs. E. Shaeffer, Mrs. William Cunningham, Mrs. Mackley, Mrs. C. Billingslea, Mrs. Edwards, Mrs. George Parke, Miss Lottie Moore; contributors to the gift basket, Mrs. John L. Reifsnider, Miss Louise Reifsnider, Mrs. Katherine Shellman, Mrs. Charles T. Reifsnider, Miss Carrie Horner, Mrs. D. A. Shipley, Miss May Gardner, Miss Nannie Rinker, Miss Alice Huber, Miss Grace Gorsuch, Miss Mattie Hook, Orndorff's Sons, M. Schneeberger, Miller Bros., Theodore Derr & Son, Sharrer Bros. and John T. Anders. Bibles and reading matter were contributed by the Prisoners' Aid Association of Baltimore, through Rev. L. F. Zinkhan, carol with music, Prof. H. Sanders, of Sanders & Stayman, Baltimore, and programs with words of carol by "Carroll Record."

The responses to our appeal for assistance were so generous, that the committee were enabled to save a portion of the money contributed, which will be used in the purchase of new and desirable hymn books for use in the Sunday services. The merchants who contributed at Thanksgiving were not asked to give to the Christmas festival. In the name of those who were made happy by this Christmas treat, and in the name of the entire committee, I return sincere thanks to all.

MARY BOSTWIC SHELLMAN  
Organist Alms House Com.

The tradition of entertaining the "inmates" at Christmas was long lasting. The writer recalls that his Manchester cub scout pack sang carols to the residents shortly before the facility closed. While we did not fully understand why the people were living there, it was easy to see that our visit brought a little joy to their faces.

Photo Caption: A group of female "inmates" posed in front of the Carroll County Alms House with a young woman holding a baby in this turn-of-the-century image. The latter woman may have been the wife of the Alms House superintendent. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, Mary B. Shellman Collection, Gift of Rev. Paul Reese, 1941.