

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

"Union Bridge"

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By Joe Getty

When Daniel Wolfe wrote his history of Union Bridge, he began with the following paragraph that questioned the authenticity of the oral traditions in this region: "In writing up the local history of most of our Maryland towns there is but little data in which the writer can place implicit confidence - being chiefly traditional, it must be accepted with some degree of doubt. There has never been to my knowledge a local historical society organized here to gather up and record the facts connected with our early settlements hence, we today have not the aid that such an organization would have furnished; we are left to glean mostly from tradition with a few recorded facts here and there."

Wolfe, like the other authors in the series of community histories prepared for The Carroll Record in the 1890s, paid a great service to Carroll County by writing down the anecdotes and traditions that he learned about during the 19th century. Without their work, these fascinating aspects of our local heritage would be lost.

The Historical Society of Carroll County is compiling this series for the first time in a book format for publication this fall. An advisory committee of representatives from communities in northwestern Carroll County is assisting in locating photographs to illustrate the text. The book will include a 1994 historical supplement of family, business and organizational histories submitted by donors to the publication project.

Wolfe's "History of Union Bridge" is similar in format to the other community histories in the series. He describes in detail the beginnings of settlement in Union Bridge and the vicinity. He also provides histories of community organizations and institutions. In surveying the development of the community, he viewed the coming of the railroad as a major turning point in the town's growth:

"Union Bridge was for a number of years on a stand still. Those who did build seemed not to have anticipated the future town as is evinced in the narrow cramped condition of Main Street to-day. Joseph Moore in 1837 purchased from David Switzer, 41 acres known as a part of "Rich Indian Garden" embracing all that part of town lying west of Main Street.

"This entire tract he farmed for several years, there being then no buildings on the west side of the street. In 1846 he laid out a series of building lots bordering on what is now Main Street, and offered them for sale. This was the first public advertisement of building sites offered, and gave an opportunity to those wishing a location in town to secure it. The brick house formerly owned by Reuben Sayler, and since bought by Crumbine, was the first dwelling erected on west side (1845-6); the second is the house occupied by Baker brothers, and Moses Shaw built his house in 1848.

"It was about this time that the railroad agitation was exciting our people to some extent. A branch road from the B. & O. seemed then most feasible, but this idea was abandoned, and in 1855-6, work was actually begun in the building of the Western Maryland, and in May 1862, the first passenger trains came to Union Bridge. During this time but little additional building had been done in the town, other than the brick depot and warehouse built by Moses Shaw and David Hiltabidle, and some other buildings by the railroad company. But upon the completion of the railroad to this point, which was its terminus for six years, and also the locating of the company's machine shops here, an active demand sprang up

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for dwelling houses for its employees and their families. That part of the town nearest and most convenient to the depot and machine shops, being east of Main Street, and bounding on Elgar street, could not be obtained either by purchase or lease for the purpose of building thereon, by reason of the occupants having a life estate therein. In 1865 this life estate terminated by death of occupant, and the premises brought into market, laid out in lots, and sold by the executor at public sale February 3rd., 1866, and purchased by Jesse Anders, Jasper Shriner, and Thomas T. Norris, who began selling lots to those wanting homes, or wishing to build for rent.

"The town now made a very decided improvement. In the meantime, Moses Shaw and Joseph Moore opened that part of the street since known as Broadway, from Main Street westward, and this gave access to the remaining portion of Joseph Moore's premises, the greater part of which has since been purchased and built upon."

The other element that is frequently found in this series of community histories is the pride that these authors had in their communities. Wolfe concludes his history with a description of the prosperity of Union Bridge as shown by the thriving businesses and professions in 1895:

"Our town has a population of 600 or more with a town hall (erected 1884.) Two hotels, three saloons where evil spirits are not cast out - but in, three dry good stores, one shoe and notion store, two bakeries, with confectionery and notions attached, two hardware stores, three groceries, one green grocery, two butcher shops, one coal and lumber yard, and one with coal only, one furniture store, three medical doctors, - two allopathists and one homeopathist, -one dental doctor, and one veterinarian." The Historical Society is publishing "The Carroll Record Histories of Northwestern Carroll County Communities" in the fall of 1994. The book will include a supplement of family, business and organizational histories prepared by donors to this publication project. If you would like additional information about this project, contact the Historical Society at (410) 848-6494.

Cutlines: Postcards from the turn-of-the-century display the businesses and residences of Union Bridge. The postcards are from the Historical Society of Carroll County collection.

Photo Caption 1: A tree-lined street and brick sidewalks enhanced this residential section of Benedum Street. The town was once known for having fine sugar-trees lining its streets.

Photo Caption 2: The Western Maryland Hotel was one of several hotels that once existed in Union Bridge to accomodate summer tourists and railroad travelers.

Photo Caption 3: The Union Bridge Banking and Trust Company served the community from this impressive Victorian structure that was designed by J. Dempwolf, an architect from York, Pennsylvania.

Photo Caption 4: The Methodist Protestant Church was built in 1882-84 and today serves the congregation of the Union Bridge United Methodist Church.

Photo Caption 5: The Maryland Collegiate Institute began in 1898 and developed an impressive campus during its first decade of educational service to the community. In 1912, it merged with Blue Ridge College in New Windsor.