

## Carroll County Times “Carroll’s Yesteryears” Articles

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HSCC Collection Overview

Carroll County Times article for 24 June 1990

By Jay A. Graybeal

As curator of the Historical Society of Carroll County, I am often asked many questions about our collection. People are interested about the kinds of collections we own, the types of objects that we would like to acquire and the ways that we use the many things that people have given us. In this introductory article, I would like to respond by giving a brief history of the Historical Society's collection.

During the harsh winter of 1939, local citizens met to discuss the formation of a county historical society. Their main goal was the preservation of the historic Shellman house in Westminster which was threatened by demolition. This property at 206 Main Street had been the home of Mary Bostwick Shellman (1849 - 1938) a well-known local community leader and amateur historian. The group incorporated as the Historical Society of Carroll County and purchased the house for its headquarters. As stated in the organization's certificate of incorporation, its purpose was “to collect and preserve all papers, books, documents or other matter or things pertaining to the history of Carroll County...” and “to create a public interest in the history of Carroll County...” The purchase provided the Historical Society with a permanent and historically significant property for use as a house museum and public programs facility.

The acquisition of the empty Shellman house attracted many early gifts from the membership. Led by resident curator Miss Lillian Shipley (1890-1989), the Historical Society actively solicited donations to furnish the home. During the decade of her leadership as curator from 1953 to 1962, a number of important donations were added to the collection and exhibits were created on topics including historical flags, dolls, glass, teapots, lusterware and furniture. Her work was a legacy to the community especially through educational programs that included publications, local dramatics, historic garden restoration and special events.

Most of the objects were donated by local families but some were contributed from out-of-state descendants. Most gifts were not focused collections but were mixed family heirlooms. An example is the first donation which included textiles, domestic tools, military items and a newspaper from Miss Mollie Shriver (1875-1967). The primary desire of donors was to place valued objects in a permanent repository where they would be preserved for posterity.

Several important collections were received during the formative years. In 1955, the Historical Society acquired the J. Leland Jordan Collection of historic newspapers and related ephemera. Jordan (1897-1955) had served as editor of the Carroll County Times in the 1940s. Always an avid local historian, he amassed an impressive collection of local newspapers, most of them bound editor's copies, as well as manuscripts, booklets, historical photographs, clippings, and scrapbooks. Many of these items inspired or provided copy for the Times' extensive coverage of local history topics on a regular basis.

At the death of charter member and past president Dr. Arthur G. Tracey (1880-1960), the Historical Society received his extensive collection of research materials on central and western Maryland land patents and related topics. Dr. Tracey and his daughter Grace (1914-1972) devoted several decades to this study and produced an extensive card file reference system to the original land patents for present

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day Carroll, Baltimore, Frederick, and Washington counties. The Traceys also prepared metes-and-bounds drawings of each of the thousands of properties. Their original work about colonial Maryland land history remains unparalleled.

The acquisition of collections and generous loans from members made it possible to mount several special exhibitions in the 1940s and 1950s. Topics included local furniture, redware, pewter, lusterware, teapots and an impressive collection of early American flags. These exhibits created considerable public interest in the decorative arts and attracted additional objects donated for the collection. The Historical Society opened an exhibition room in the county office building in Westminster for the display of objects not used in the furnished rooms of the Sherman-Fisher-Shellman House.

The Historical Society was involved in a number of important collections-related projects in the 1960s. A basement room in the Sherman-Fisher-Shellman House was renovated in 1962 for an exhibition on the county’s rural free delivery mail system, inaugurated in 1899 as the nation’s first. National and local celebrations played a prominent role in raising public awareness of local history. Beginning with the Civil War Centennial in 1961, countians rediscovered the history of this critical period through an exhibit of military objects and from *Just South of Gettysburg* by Frederick Shriver Klein, published by the Historical Society in 1963. Three years later, the Commissioners of Carroll County purchased the brick house next door to the Sherman-Fisher-Shellman House and donated this property to the Historical Society. This house had been the home of Mrs. Harry M. Kimmey (c.1880-1961). Mrs. Kimmey was among the first in the community to suggest that a civic organization be formed to acquire the vacant Shellman house. It was at her home that the future members met to discuss the incorporation of the Historical Society.

Renovations to the Kimmey House in 1968 included the construction of an auditorium, named for President James M. Shriver (1895-1972) and benefactor Victor Weybright (1903-1978), a reference library and another museum room in the basement. Exhibited there were most of the objects which had been displayed in the county office building. The American Bicentennial in 1976 stimulated considerable public interest in local history and focused attention on preserving and displaying collections. As part of these celebrations the Historical Society redecorated major rooms in the Sherman-Fisher-Shellman House.

The construction of the Shriver-Weybright Auditorium provided the much-needed space for public programs and temporary exhibitions. Recent exhibitions have included selections from the Historical Society’s textile collection, historical photographs, historical archaeology and an introduction to local black history.

The 1980s has been a decade of great progress with regard to collections growth, care and interpretation. In 1983, the Historical Society acquired its third historic property with the gift of Hard Lodging, a Federal style brick house near Union Bridge, from Mrs. Thelma Walden (Littlefield) Shriner (b. 1895). Hard Lodging is furnished with a mix of eighteenth-and nineteenth-century furniture, silver, paintings, ceramics, books and prints as well as reproductions, representing several generations of the Walden, Littlefield and Shriner families. Mrs. Shriner has made provisions for these objects to be given to the Historical Society as a bequest. The collection will add a number of significant examples of local

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furniture, like the Chippendale style desk owned by Peter Shriner (1747-1838), as well as objects from Bowling Brook, the estate of Robert Wyndham Walden (1844-1905) in Middleburg.

The long-term preservation of objects in the collection is one of the fundamental responsibilities of the Historical Society. We are the stewards of an unique and irreplaceable collection. The addition of professional staff has enabled the Historical Society to achieve many goals related to our collections and, thereby, realize our trust responsibilities to preserve, research and interpret collections. Considerable efforts have been made to reduce damage from excessive handling, light and harsh environmental conditions to ensure their survival for future generations. Collection research provides a sound basis for special exhibitions, publications and educational programs.

The collections at the Historical Society are not static but continue to grow. New acquisitions provide evidence about aspects of local history but more often than not they suggest new research topics. Research by staff and other scholars is conducted for cataloging, exhibits, publications, and educational programs. It is hoped that this column will encourage a rediscovery of objects in family collections and that it will stimulate new research in a variety of local history topics.

My contribution to this column will cover a number of themes relating to a curator’s point of view. Upcoming articles will deal with special collections, exhibitions, historical archaeology, objects such as furniture, manuscripts or militaria, and topics relating to the research and restoration projects at our three historic properties. These articles will focus on the analysis and interpretation of historical objects and how they provide insights about Carroll County’s cultural history.

*No photo available.*

### Photo Caption:

Miss Lillian Shipley was the Historical Society’s first curator and directed many early initiatives in collecting, preserving and interpreting Carroll County’s history. She is shown here in a photograph taken in 1954 standing with one of the many excellent flags in the Society’s collection. Historical Society of Carroll County collection.