

Carroll History Journal

Historical Society of Carroll County, Maryland

VIGNETTES OF COCKEY'S TAVERN

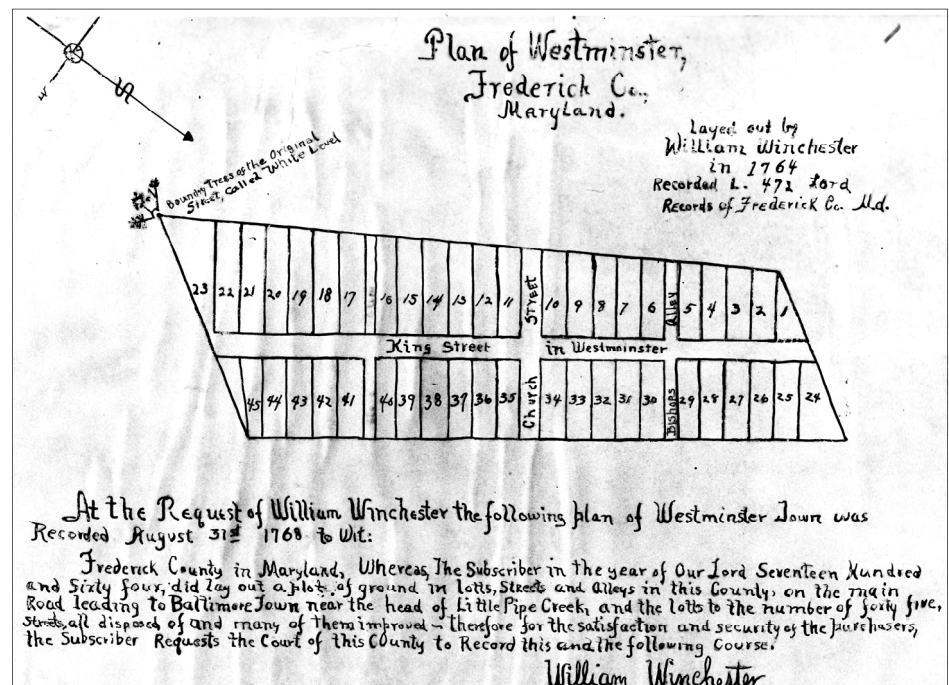
With the opening this Spring of the renovated Cockey's Tavern as part of the Historical Society campus, Executive Director Timatha Pierce thought the Society members might find it interesting to learn something about some of the former owners and residents of the approximately 180-year-old house (there is no definitive date for the building). Various members of the Committee researched the Society's records and archives for information and provided the vignettes that follow. Readers are also referred to a detailed architectural and historical analysis of the house completed in 2000 by Ken Short, architectural historian, and Jay Graybeal, former Director of the Society's Museum and Library. It can be found by going to the Society's website: <http://hscc.carr.org/property/Cockeys.htm>.

THE EARLY YEARS

The Cockey's Tavern property was part of the original 45 lots of Westminster laid out by William Winchester in 1764. Lots 44 and 45, each about a half acre, were not sold until 1788, when they were purchased by Andrew Reese for 20 pounds. Perhaps he built a frame dwelling on one of the two lots before selling them both to Dr. George Colegate in 1810 for \$1,600. The records then become confused, but it appears that by 1822 one of the lots, with a two-story brick house, was purchased by William H.

McCannon, Mrs. Colegate's brother, after the doctor's death.

In 1825 the property changed hands again, being purchased by John C. Cockey, a state delegate and McCannon's father-in-law. Following John Cockey's death in 1826, the property went to his wife Mary. She soon married her brother-in-law, Joshua Cockey, who ran the property as a hotel. Because of some legal problems regarding the disposition of the estate, the cashier of the Bank of Westminster, John Fisher, in 1832 advertised for sale the property "of a large and commodious two-story



William Winchester's original plan for Westminster in 1764 laid out 45 lots along "the main Road leading to Baltimore Town near the head of Little Pipe Creek." The building known as Cockey's Tavern occupies Lots 44 and 45 on this original plan.

brick house, eligibly situated on the Main st. in Westminster, and now occupied by Mr. Joshua Cockey, as a hotel. It has ample and convenient stabling connected with it; and all the usual outhouses. . .” When the hotel did not sell, Joshua Cockey purchased it for \$3,000.

By 1833 Joshua Cockey decided to leave Westminster and advertised for sale all the real

estate, including the hotel. There were no buyers, and since Cockey still owed the bank over \$6,000, he turned the property over to the bank. Fisher rented the property and Elias Hunt took over the operation of the hotel. The bank continued to control the hotel or tavern, either as lessee or owner, until 1872 when it was purchased by John Brooke Boyle.

James Lightner

JOHN FISHER AND DR. WILLIAM WILLIS

John Fisher, at least the eighth person to control the fate of Cockey’s Tavern, was born locally in 1780 and by 1829 had become cashier of the well-established Bank of Westminster, a prestigious position he held until his death. The middle-aged bachelor bought 206 East Main Street, now known as the Sherman/Fisher/Shellman House, in 1833 and eventually settled there in the 1840s with assorted relatives and a servant. His life intersects Joshua Cockey’s at several points.

Cockey was \$6,500 in debt to the Bank of Westminster when he advertised his tavern for rent in an 1835 Westminster newspaper. The ad noted he had recently “taken *Hussey’s Wheatfield Inn*, in Baltimore,” so he must have been over his head financially between his business interests in both places. To solve some of his problems, he deeded his properties in Frederick (now Carroll) County to John Fisher who would act as trustee, having the power to rent or sell them on Cockey’s behalf as he saw fit. Income from any transactions would be applied toward Cockey’s bank debt, but Fisher would keep a small commission for his efforts. This seems a rather odd arrangement given Fisher’s position at the same bank, but Cockey’s long association with that financial institution probably assured him he would receive fair treatment.

A March 1836 issue of *The Carrolltonian*, and *Baltimore and Frederick Advertiser* contains Fisher’s ad for the newly-acquired tavern: “Valuable Tavern Stand. For Rent! That large and commodious establishment in Westminster, lately occupied by J. Cockey, is offered for Rent, from and after the 1st day of April next. This house is fitted up in the best style, and is admirably calculated to accommodate an excellent business, which it has heretofore received.

Attached to the house are excellent Stabling, and two fine Gardens.”

By 1838, ads for the tavern had disappeared from *The Carrolltonian*. Local tradition says one tenant during this period was Dr. William Willis (1800-1841), son of Reverend Henry Willis, the highly respected itinerant Methodist preacher who worked with Francis Asbury during the heyday of early Methodism at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

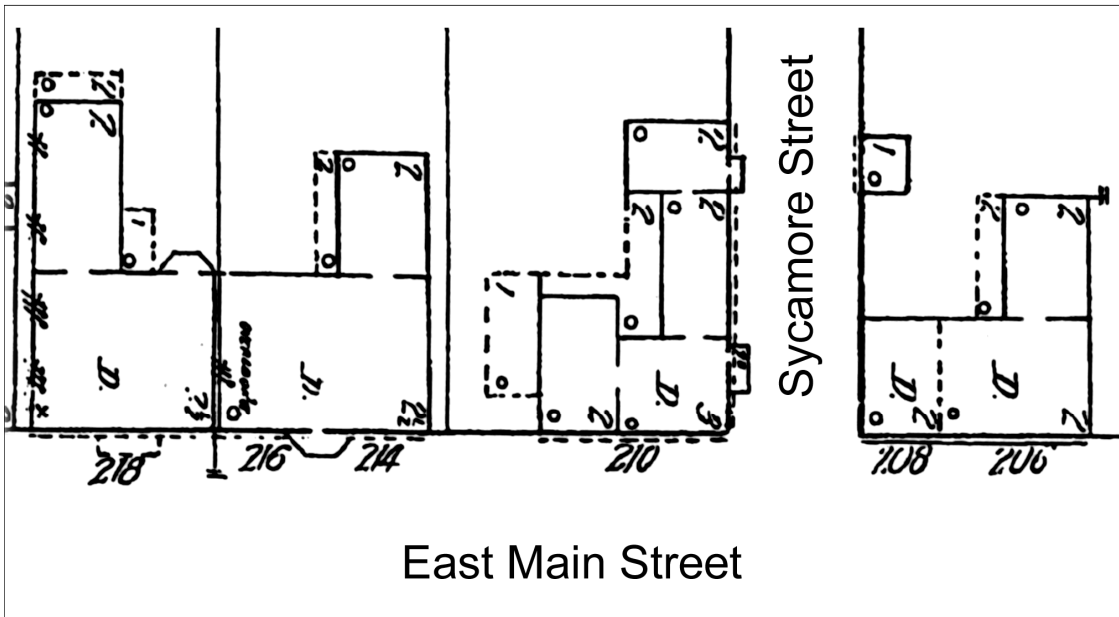
Willis graduated from the

University of Maryland’s School of Medicine in 1818. In 1835, he advertised he was giving up his solo medical practice in Westminster and joining a Dr. Forry to offer their combined services in “medicine, surgery and obstetrics.” The men established their offices in the Westminster drug store that Forry owned. It sold a wide range of drugs as well as liquor “for medicinal purposes.”

**VALUABLE
TAVERN STAND.
FOR RENT!**

THAT large and commodious establishment in Westminster, lately occupied by J. Cockey, is offered for Rent, from and after the 1st day of April next. This house is fitted up in the best style, and is admirably calculated to accommodate an excellent business, which it has heretofore received. Attached to the house are excellent Stabling, and two fine Gardens. Apply to **JOHN FISHER.** Westminster, March 14.





This drawing, based on the 1910 Sanborn map of Westminister, shows the properties now owned by the Historical Society: the Sherman-Fisher-Shellman House (206-208), the Kimmey House (210), and Cockey's Tavern (214-216). The 208 and 214 street numbers have been discontinued since this Sanborn map was published.

During the 1830s, the ambitious Willis was not only a practicing physician but also commander of a militia unit, Whig politician, president of the Westminister Savings Institution, and clerk of the court after Carroll County was established in 1837. Cockey's Tavern, his residence in the late 1830s, served as the initial meeting place for the courts. The County had neither courthouse nor jail at first, so privately owned Westminister buildings, especially those as commodious as the tavern, served as temporary sites for various branches of the government. The Willis family probably continued as Fisher's tenants until William died in 1841 and perhaps longer. Whether the property was operated

estate in Westminister, particularly at the prosperous east end of town along Main and Green Streets. Six years later he negotiated the sale of Cockey's Tavern to the Bank of Westminister and was finally relieved of his responsibilities as trustee of Joshua Cockey's local properties.

When he died in 1863, Fisher's estate was worth nearly \$100,000 – much of it in real estate and stock in the Bank of Westminister. His wealthy widow later married prominent local judge William P. Maulsby.

Mary Ann Ashcraft

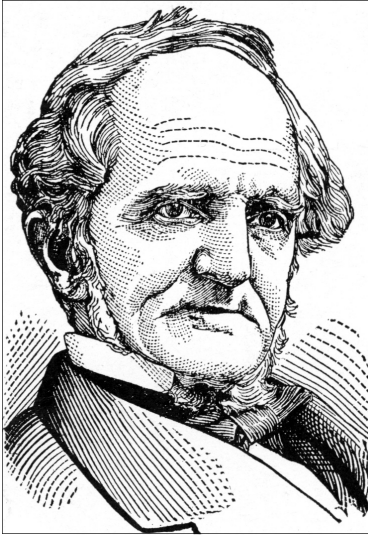
as a tavern or hotel, a residence, or had multiple uses throughout Fisher's long tenure (1835-1862) as trustee is unclear.

In 1856, at the ripe age of 76, John Fisher married Anna E. Morthland, a woman about 40 years his junior. He must have been considered quite a "catch" in spite of his age, because the elderly bachelor owned large quantities of real

JOHN BROOKE BOYLE

John Brooke Boyle, the son of Daniel and Mary Henrietta (Brooke) Boyle, was born, according to his obituary, on July 25, 1811, in Taneytown, where his father, the son of Irish immigrants, was a merchant. One of seven or eight children, he attended the preparatory school of Mount Saint Mary's College (founded in 1808) from 1825 to 1827, being at the time of his death one of the oldest living alumni. He began his career as a farmer in Taneytown where, according to the Carroll County

Tax List of 1837, he owned 134 acres and a log house. On June 5, 1832, he married Elizabeth Maynadier Scott, daughter of John and Elizabeth Key (Bruce) Scott of Annapolis, a family with strong ties to Taneytown: Elizabeth's sister, Margaret, married Daniel Swope of Taneytown—one and perhaps two of John's sisters also married Swopes—and her brother Upton Scott of Bruceville married John's sister Ann. Margaret's other brother, Dr. Norman Bruce Scott, lived in Hagerstown.



Col. John Brooke Boyle.

John Boyle's political career took off after he was appointed chief judge of the District Court in 1835. Upon the founding of Carroll County in 1837, he was elected to the House of Delegates as a Democrat and reelected in 1838, 1840, 1841, and 1847. Appointed clerk of the Circuit Court in 1849, he was elected to that position both in 1851

and in 1867, serving a total of fourteen years. He also served as a judge of the Orphans' Court. Long called "Colonel," Boyle controlled politics in Westminster and Carroll County for many years.

By 1850 he and his family were living in Westminster. The U.S. census taken on July 17 of that year lists John B. Boyle, 38, clerk, owner of real estate worth \$4,500; his wife, Elizabeth M., 37; and six children: Daniel, 17, Mary, 14, Charles, 12, Henry, 10, Helen, 7, and John, 1. The four eldest children had attended school within the year, but by July Daniel's occupation was assistant clerk. Although there is no street address, the Boyles might have lived next door to John Winters, the Lutheran minister, and Hanson Y. Webb, the county sheriff.

John was a presidential elector on the Breckenridge ticket in 1860 when the family, now larger by three more children—Norman Bruce, 9, Joseph Bernard (erroneously called Henry in the census report), 6, and Elizabeth Key, 3—had moved into two adjoining houses. Daniel had left home, and Charles, 22 and a farmer like his father, headed the second household, which

included all the younger children as well as his grandmother Elizabeth (Key) Scott, 81. Were they already living in Cockey's Tavern and 218 East Main Street?

Aside from his political offices, John Boyle served as secretary and treasurer of the Western Maryland Railroad and apparently farmed as well. In 1870 he owned real estate valued at \$15,500 and had a personal estate worth \$12,000. During the Civil War, two and very probably three of his sons served in the Confederate army: Dr. Charles Brooke Boyle of Taneytown, Henry Boyle of Carroll County, and surgeon Daniel Scott Boyle. Henry became a merchant in Taneytown and then chief weigher at the Baltimore custom house. Boyle's fourth son, John Brooke Boyle, also became a physician, practicing in Baltimore. The youngest son, Joseph Bernard, after attending Calvert College in New Windsor and West Point, became a pharmacist and the Westminster postmaster during the Cleveland administration (1885-1889, 1893-1897).

John Boyle purchased Cockey's Tavern in 1872. His wife died in 1876, and in 1880 he was living two doors from the Shellmans with five of his unmarried children: Mary; Daniel (who was now insane);



This photo of Cockey's Tavern was taken in the early 1900s, shortly after the renovations to the house were completed. Note the high roof enclosing an enlarged third floor and attic, the dormers, and bay windows.

Norman, assistant clerk of the Circuit Court; Joseph, druggist; and Elizabeth. Helen and Harry Irwin had married prior to 1870. In 1886 Boyle deeded 218 East Main Street to Helen and 216 East Main in 1893 to Elizabeth, now married to Charles E. Fink, on condition that her sister Mary might live there for the rest of her life. Mary, however, died in May 1894 and John Boyle on April 15, 1896. A monument in

St. John's Cemetery, Westminster, commemorates John Brooke Boyle, his wife, Elizabeth Maynadier Scott, their eldest son, Daniel Scott (April 3, 1833-February 4, 1901), and their daughter Mary Brooke (September 6, 1835-May 14, 1894).

Eleanor Darcy

CHARLES FINK

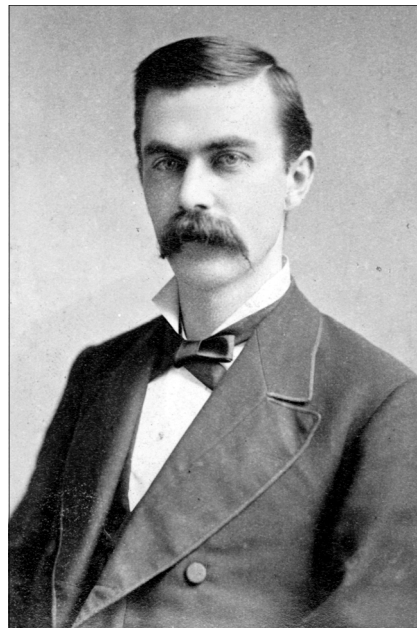
After Charles E. Fink remodeled Cockey's Tavern in 1905, the building looked quite different from when Joshua Cockey put his tavern up for sale in 1833. Fink had added a third story with a gambrel roof, installed bays and enlarged other windows, erected front entrance columns and a pediment, and created a vestibule.

Charles Fink lived an interesting life that started in Adams County, Pennsylvania. His first career goal was the priesthood. Perhaps he'd already given up that dream when he met Elizabeth Key Boyle at a party given by the Shriver family, and they became enamored with each other. According to a granddaughter, Agnes (Fink) Maynard, family lore has it that the lure of Elizabeth Boyle brought him to Carroll County from Gettysburg.

Fink was the county's first bicycle agent and introduced the "facile" bike to the county, a cycle engineered to bring the rider closer to the ground and safety than its "sky scraper" predecessor. Fink's true profession was law, but he was involved in banking, real estate, and Democratic party politics as well. He was counsel for the town of Westminster in 1890 and for several years thereafter. In 1891 he was elected State's Attorney, a position he held for four years. Following that assignment, he became involved in the organization and promotion of telephone lines in the county and in Norfolk and Newport News, Virginia. Together with George M. Parke and

George W. Albaugh, he organized the Westminster Deposit and Trust Company and served as an officer on the board of directors. With Governor Edwin

Warfield he formed the Fidelity and Deposit Company of Baltimore. He was a director and counsel for the Belvedere Hotel Company and a director of the Union Trust Company. Fink chaired the Democratic Party's Central Committee for many years. In 1905 he ran for Congress but lost.



Charles E. Fink, Jr.
Photo courtesy of Robert Farver.

As reported in the *American Sentinel* of December 2, 1910, Charles E. Fink, Esq. purchased 1,535 acres of land in Goochland County, Virginia. This held a mansion house of brick painted white, and the land fronted the James River for one and one half miles. There were significant outbuildings including a large brick grain barn and mill building. The property was known as "Irwin on the

James," formerly Blythewood. The sale was a private covenant between Fink and the owner, Captain P. H. Irwin. His sons, J. Brooke Fink and Charles E. Fink, Jr., were assigned to get the land under proper cultivation over the winter of 1911.

Charles E. Fink died at age 65 on January 17, 1919, at St. Joseph's Hospital in Baltimore "from a complication of diseases which affected his heart." He is buried in St. John's Cemetery. His wife Elizabeth had predeceased him by several years.

Timatha Pierce

THE HOFFMAN FAMILY

The sign outside said simply "Hoffman's Inn." It had been established in 1922 when J. Frank Hoffman (1868-1957) and his wife Mary Elizabeth (Zile) Hoffman (1871-1959) bought the property from the Finks and moved from their farm "Gypsy Hill" near Winfield, because Frank was wearying of the heavy farm work. They wanted to be in town, closer to schools for their three youngest children. Joining them in the house were Thelma Larue (1897-1979), Lillian W. (1900-1963), T. Howard (1905-1953), Doris (1909-2000) and Margaret (1911-2005). A fourth daughter, Esther L. (1898-1960), was already employed in Washington, D.C., by 1918. "Mom" Hoffman was a wonderful cook and a good manager; she was also a good judge of prospective boarders and soon had all she could accommodate in the 17-room house. When her

health began to fail, she turned over her responsibilities to Thelma, who had always been there helping out.

The oldest daughter thrived on the whirlwind of daily activities: planning the meals, doing the marketing, supervising the cleaning and cooking, and planning the catering for special events which were often held in the house by organizations from the community and the College. But woe to the person who interrupted her regular afternoon nap!

The boarding house regularly was home to about ten roomers. Based on the 1930 census, for example, five single women (average age 23), teachers in the local public schools, and five single men (average age 30), managers or salesmen in local businesses,



This photo of a local "Poker Club" was taken in the dining room at Hoffman's Inn in 1955. Standing: Ben Thomas, Paul Whitmore, Miller Richardson and Ralph Bonsack Seated: Frank Leidy, Norman Boyle (grandson of John Brooke Boyle), John Cunningham, Howard Brown, Theodore Brown.

resided as boarders. Each evening these folks returned to the house to have their dinner in the dining room, along with a number of special guests for banquets in the drawing room and the family in the enclosed rear porch. Thelma would personally serve as many as 30 people, providing heaping platters and bowls of fried chicken, steak, turkey, several vegetables, corn fritters, and cole slaw with a whipped cream dressing, as well as sticky buns and hot rolls. A generous person, she made regular donations of food to the appreciative old ladies who lived in the Methodist home across the street. She was also known to be a “clearing house” of local news and gossip which she readily passed on to all her guests. Thelma Hoffman displayed a mercurial temperament and was certainly a local character.

After forty-seven years, Hoffman’s Inn was sold in 1969 to John Donofrio for \$45,000, destined to become “Cockey’s Tavern” under a new manager, John Desmond. Thelma’s boarders were not too worried about finding another place to live. But they were very concerned about where they would find the good food she had produced daily. Thelma moved to a home on West Green Street where she resided until her death in April 1979.

After the family moved off the farm and established the boarding house, Frank Hoffman became a

warden for the State Forestry Administration. His daughter Doris became a teacher and later married James B. Lake and moved to Princeton, New Jersey. Daughter Margaret married Richard Richardson and remained in Westminster. Daughter Esther L. “Miss Tillie” joined the Military Intelligence Service in 1918, served for a time as secretary to President Coolidge’s military aide, and sailed for China in 1925 to work at the American Legation. In 1941 she was sent to the new Army liaison office in Hong Kong but, with the outbreak of World War II, she and her colleagues were interned by the Japanese for seven months before being returned to Washington. Following the war she was reassigned to China but, with the Communist takeover in 1949, she was evacuated in a harrowing escape. She continued to work in military intelligence at the Pentagon until her retirement in 1959.

Hoffman’s boarding house was an institution in Westminster for 47 years, locally famous because of the large family of eight that originally lived there, the many boarders who shared Elizabeth and Thelma’s bountiful tables over the years, and the colorful women of the family who made the Hoffman name well-known in the community.

James Lightner

MIKE EATON – CELEBRATED BOARDER

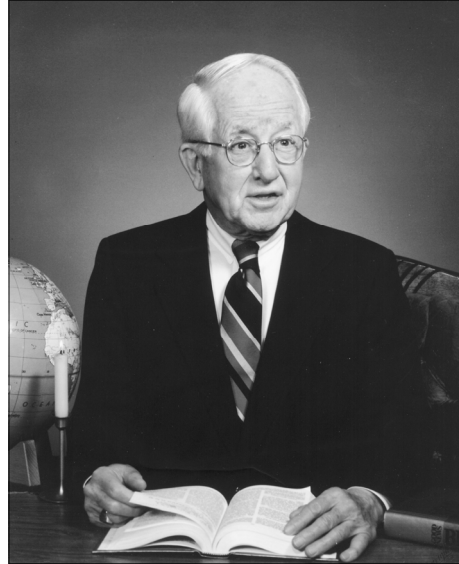
One of the several long-time residents at Thelma Hoffman’s Boarding House over the four decades was William Granville “Mike” Eaton (1908-1995). Born in Centerville, Maryland, he came to Westminster in 1926 to enroll in Western Maryland College, graduating in 1930 with a degree in English and receiving awards for his extra-curricular activities and as the best all-around college man. He then headed for New York where he completed a Master of Arts degree at Columbia University, before returning to Carroll County in 1935 to begin his teaching career at Westminster High School (first at the old building at Center and Green, and then at the new one on Longwell Avenue). He taught English, advised the Key Club, sponsored by the local Kiwanis Club of which he was a member, and

directed countless dramatic productions until his retirement in 1971. (He chose not to move to the new high school on Washington Road because he felt it would be too big and impersonal, and he wouldn’t have felt comfortable there.)

Eaton has been called Westminster’s “Mr. Chips” and is remembered by legions of students for his dedicated and inspiring teaching, high standards and expectations, strict discipline, and especially for those “damned index cards” which terrified the students unprepared to read a weekly theme when their names were drawn. His work with dramatics is also well-remembered, especially the annual Christmas play at the high school, as well as community and Grace Lutheran Church productions.

Two of his students went on to be professional dramatists: Maryland Institute of Art drama professor Albert Hurwitz, who helped establish the Off Broadway theater movement, and Ernest “Dick” Thompson, who received the academy award for his screenplay based on his successful stage play, “On Golden Pond.”

Eaton never drove a car but literally traveled the world, visiting such exotic places as China, New Zealand, India, Egypt, and Bora Bora. He was an avid reader and theatergoer, especially enjoying



William G. “Mike” Eaton.
Photo courtesy of Paul Wardenfelt.

plays in New York, Baltimore, and London. He never married, living for 32 years in his rented room at Hoffman’s Inn before moving to Miss Hoffman’s residence on Green Street after her retirement. Eaton received many honors during his long career including several from Western Maryland College as well as from the local branch of the American Heart Association that “roasted” him in 1994. Eaton guided and befriended thousands of local students and left an enduring legacy in the community.

James Lightner

In the years following Miss Hoffman’s occupancy, the tavern was operated under the name of “Cockey’s” by several people. Unfortunately, an arson fire in March 2000 severely damaged the enclosed frame rear porch and kitchen and forced the closing of the restaurant. In November 2000 the property was acquired by the Historical Society of Carroll County.

The legacy endures through the beneficence of major donors and grantmakers. The Historical Society is deeply indebted to the Carroll County Commissioners, to the State of Maryland, and to the major donors who assured the *grande dame* of East Main Street could be renovated to soundness, beauty, and usefulness.



The interior of Cockey’s Tavern as it appeared in 1987.

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