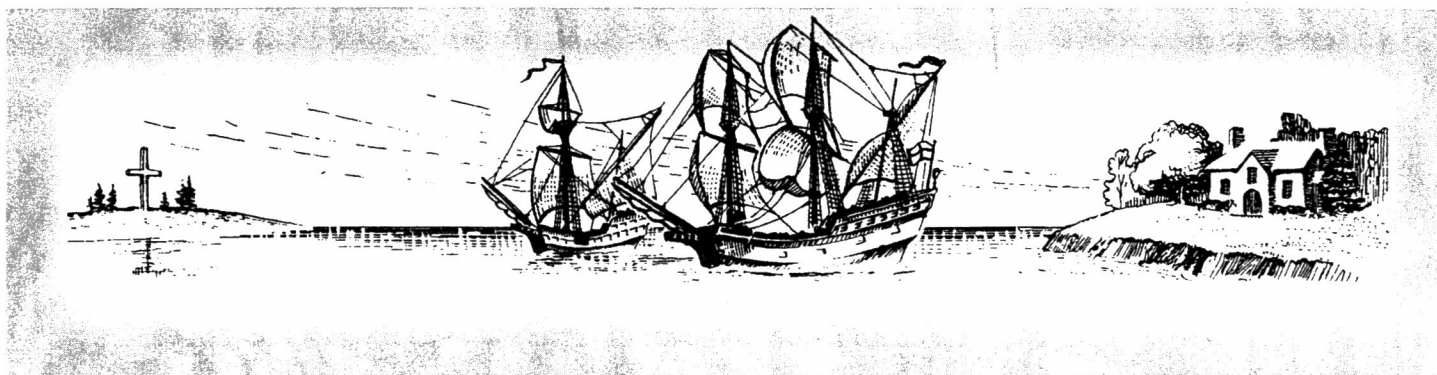


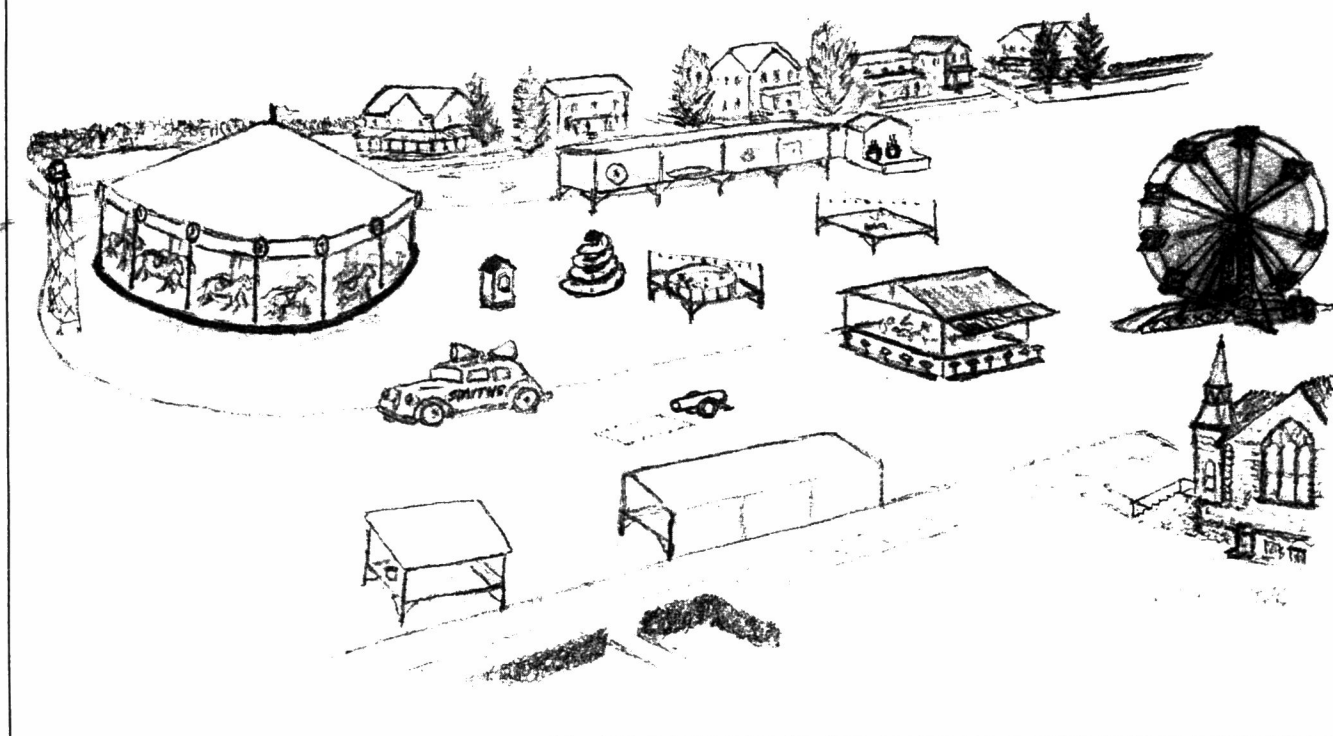


Chronicles of St. Mary's

Quarterly Magazine of the St. Mary's County Historical Society

Summer 2012

LEONARDTOWN VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT CARNIVAL



... as held on the "Village Green". (Sketch by Kennedy Abell, LVFD)

The Leonardtown Volunteer Fire Department Carnival 1926-1950

A Brief History of When the Fireman's Carnival Was on the Village Green

Compiled by Al Gough

On Saturday August 20, 2011 I had the pleasure of being included in an informal gathering at the law office of Ernie Bell in Leonardtown. Ernie had asked me to join with him in interviewing some "old fireman" with a view of writing an article for the "Leonardtown Beacon," a quarterly published by the Town of Leonardtown, on his guests recollections of the Fireman's Carnival when it was held in the Town Square. The Town Square we later learned was in the 1920's



Walter Kirk Sterling

Clinton Duke

and 30's referred to as the "Village Green." Present were Kirk Sterling, Kennedy Abell, Clinton Duke and Robert L. (Bob) and James (Jimmy) Miedzinski, firemen all, with a combined service record of some



James F. Miedzinski

Robert L. Miedzinski



Kennedy Abell

332 years as members of the Leonardtown Volunteer Fire Department. It was a fascinating two hours, filled with boyhood memories of an era long past.

Kirk, Kennedy and Clinton all grew up in homes facing the green and the Carnival was, in those days, literally at their front door. Bob and Jimmy grew up on Lawrence Ave., a stones throw from the green. They told stories of how as young boys during carnival week they would get up at day break and search for coins around the merry-go-round and Ferris wheel. Jimmy said his father put him to work at the carnival as soon as he was old enough to count change and he was operating the merry-go-round by age 14.

They all remembered many of the special event programs; "Cannon Ball Richards" was especially memorable. Kennedy recalled he had stayed at the Hotel St. Mary's, at the time owned and operated by his parents, and the talk about town each morning was what "Cannon Ball" had for breakfast. Twelve eggs was the norm. Kirk recounted that one of the special events had been a balloon ascension and a subsequent parachute jump. One evening the wind shifted and the parachutist landed in the seventh district. Search parties were sent out but finding him was no easy task

Leonardtwn Carnival Performers



"Cannon Ball Richards"



DARE DEVIL OLIVER
High Diver

The world's youngest, highest and most scientific Back Somersault High Diver, and his High-Diving Dog, U No. Carries complete outfit. For particulars address OLIVER SCHWORM, 137 Wheeler St., Tonawanda, N. Y.

"Dare Devil Oliver"
 Newspaper Advertisement

LEGARE

The Largest ^{OPEN}AIR
Sensational Act in
the World.

Best day grand stand attraction.
 Best and most brilliant night feature.
 Thrilling electric fireworks finish.

Contains many original and startling feats the imitators dare not attempt.

For particulars of this famous, record breaking, crowd-drawing spectacular feature address

LIONEL LEGARE
Bethlehem, Pa.



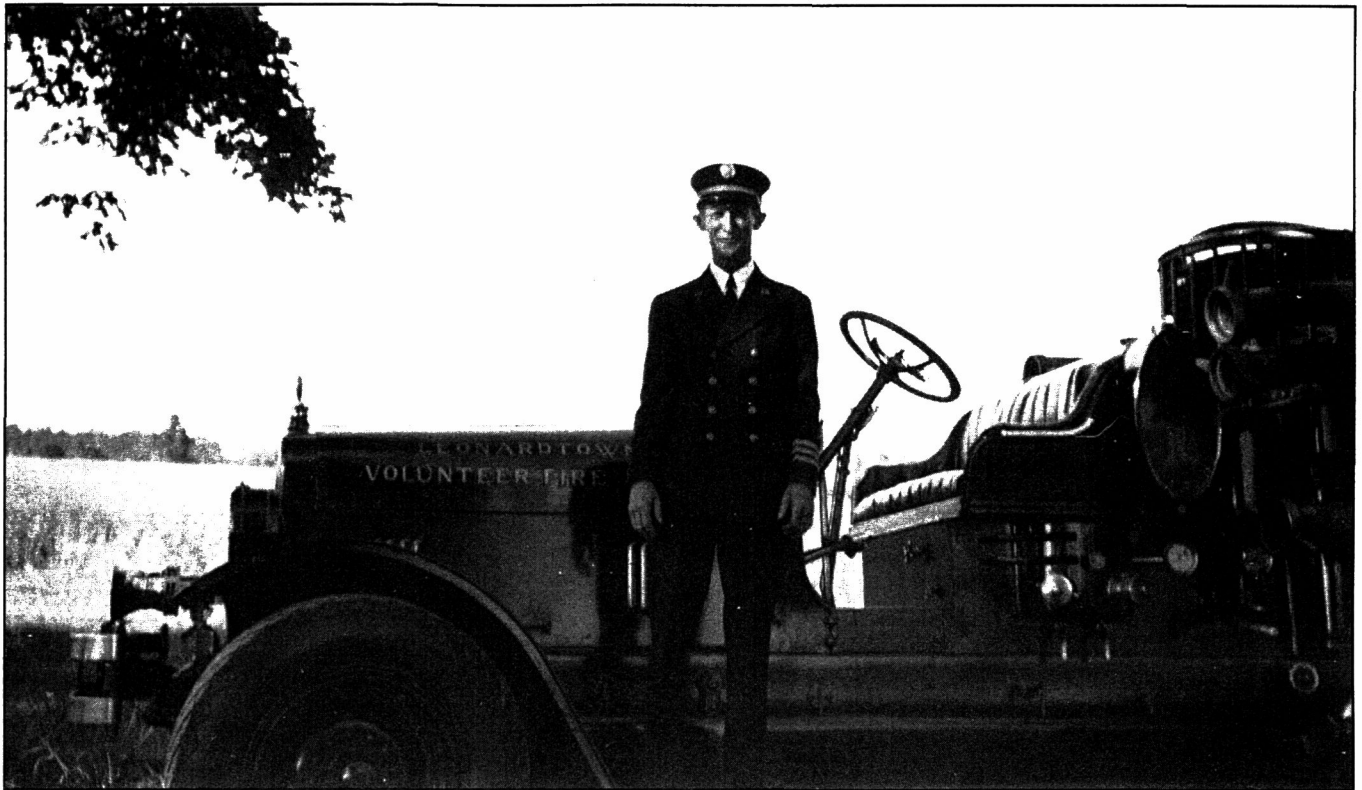
MAMMOTH SPIRAL TOWER

"Lionel Legare"
 Newspaper Advertisement

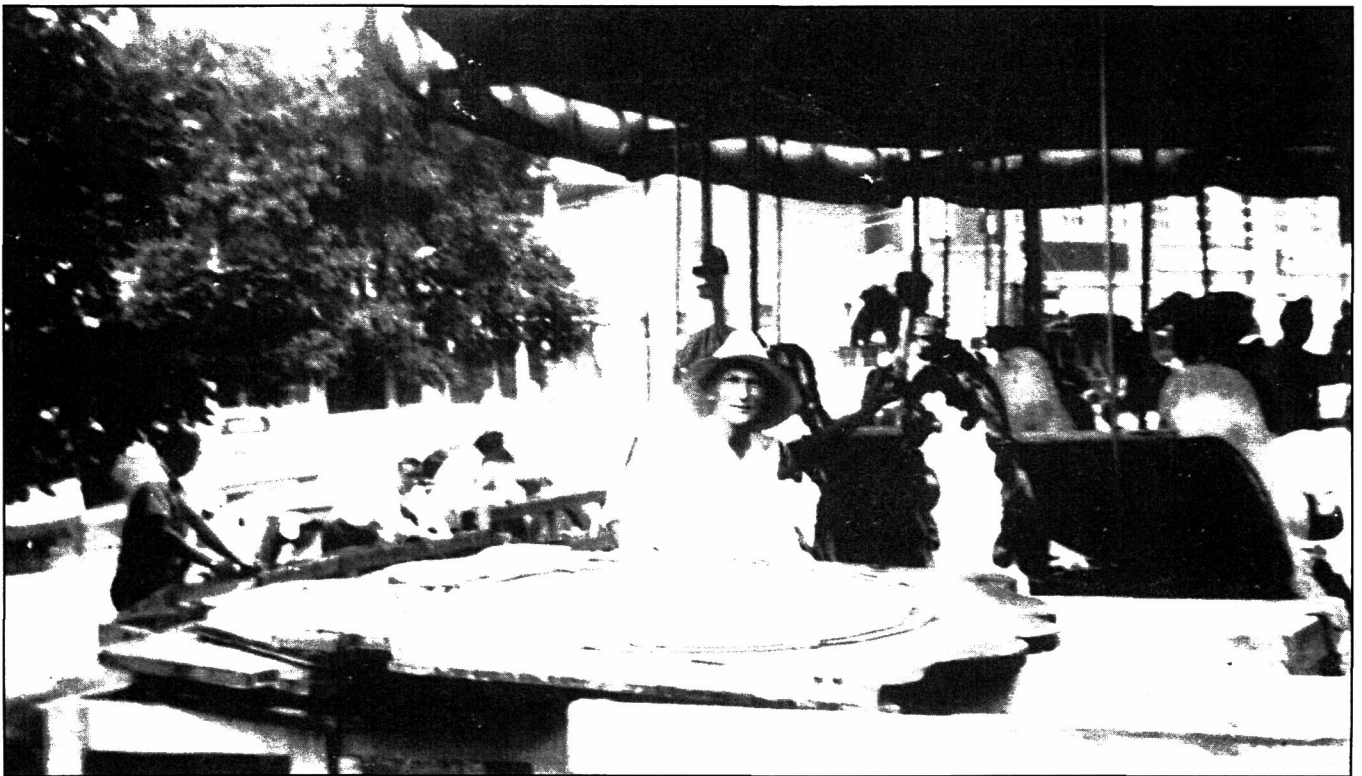
– there were no two-way radio's available. They told of Professor Legare ascending and descending a steep spiral incline on a huge rubber ball, of "Dare Devil Oliver" diving over 100 feet into a small tub of water and of the aerial artist who was injured in a fall on the first night of his act.

Henry Pilkerton, a fireman, who every child knew as the "popcorn man" would they recalled, pop corn prior to the nightly openings and fill twenty-five metal lard cans just to be able to keep up with the crowds demands. During the War, with cigarette rationing, the Firemen's cigarette stand where one could win a package of cigarettes by landing a nickel in a glass dish, was decidedly popular. Bob Miedzinski, Sr., father

of Bob and Jimmy was able to supply the cigarettes with the help of his friend Brother John, who was the principal at Leonard Hall School. Brother John would give Bob the Xaverian brothers unused ration allotments and during his many trips up and down the road operating his hauling business, Bob would make numerous stops picking up a pack here and there and thus the carnival cigarette stand was during those difficult times, well supplied. In 1947, 48 and 49 in an effort to gain additional revenue, the Department took the carnival on the road and all those present at our informal gathering had assisted in the endeavor. They set up at Solomons before construction of the Benedict and Thomas Johnson Bridges, thus requiring a trip to Wayson's Corner and then down the Calvert



Henry Pilkerton "The Popcorn Man"



**Henry Pilkerton setting up firemen's Merry Go Round in Town Park.
Jones Store and Dukes in background.**

peninsula. Hughesville, La Plata, Waldorf, Indian Head, Bryans Road and at Avenue on a lot across from Francis Gibson's store were all on the circuit. It took three trucks, a donated V12, 1934 Packard with a 445.5 cubic inch engine and extra seating capacity, some time since retired from dodging the despised "dry agents", and a lot of grit. Often times the rides would be taken down late at night and set up at another location the same evening or early in the A.M. of the following morning. Many of those involved even had day jobs.

It was fascinating to listen to their stories and to realize that at ages 15 and 16, when the Country was at war, they were fighting fires and working Carnivals. Their memories inspired me to do a little research and put some dates to those memories, and so follows a chronology of the firemen's carnival when held upon the village green.

On September 19, 1925 Rip Van Winkle and Leonardtown awoke to some exciting news. The Saint Mary's Enterprise, at that time published in Leonardtown, exclaimed to its readers:

"Chamber of Commerce, Fire Department, Electric Lighting Plant. After its Rip Van Winkle sleep of over 250 years Leonardtown awoke and stretched itself about ten years ago and then turned over for a beauty sleep until two years ago when she set up and seemed to take notice. On Monday last she wiped the cobwebs off and started sprucing up like a widow in search of a second husband. She formed a Chamber of Commerce to advertise her beauties and advantages and possibilities, organized a fire department and topped it all off with an electric lighting plant in order that its advantages may show in both a social and commercial way. More than one hundred persons had enrolled in a county wide Chamber of Commerce, committees had been formed and the headquarters would be in Leonardtown. Thirty-two residents of the town signed contracts to enlist in the fire department and it was reported that the firemen from Hyattsville fire department

'will put our boys thru their first drill and instruct them in the modern methods of fire fighting. William F. Cecil, 'a man of very progressive spirit, may many more appear in our midst' the article continued, 'has perfected plans for the installation of an electric lighting power plant at his ice plant at Leonardtown wharf. A three-phase alternating current generator powered by a 40hp diesel motor will afford sufficient current for the power and lighting needs of this city with ample provisions for the growth of our town.'"¹

During the years of 1925 to 1928 the Volunteer Fire Department was under the auspices of the Commissioners of Leonardtown. In March of 1928 the Department was reorganized with the blessings of the Commissioners to reflect its present structure. In April of 1928 the Commissioners were entertained by the Fire Department at an informal buffet at their new quarters and the Commissioners expressed themselves highly pleased with the progress and spirit displayed by the recently reorganized volunteers.²

The first carnival held for the benefit of the Leonardtown Volunteer Fire Department (LVFD) was held in Leonardtown July 5th thru the 10th of 1926, two years prior to the departments reorganization. The Carnival was put on by the "Greater Seaboard Shows" an organization of fifty people. It was billed the "Biggest Week Ever Held In St. Mary's County! The midway opened at noon, the merry-go-round better known as the "Jumping Jinny" was placed at the entrance of the show grounds, in the center was found a bingo stand, then the Ferris Wheel. Further down the Hoop La, then the Big Tent Show in the rear the famous Louis Minstrels, a real old Southern Plantation Show. Levee scenes, old time singing and dancing – fun for both young and old. There was a tent with snakes, monkeys and etc. known as the reptile show. On each side of the midway there were sixteen tented concessions. On Monday night, July 5th the management promised the largest display of fireworks ever shown in Southern Maryland and stated large rockets and sprays will light up the surrounding country for a good distance. There was and Old-Time fiddlers' contest, a popularity contest where the young lady receiving the most votes would be crowned Miss. St. Mary's and receive

a diamond ring. In addition there was a baby contest and the Charleston contest, "the new dance that seems to be the present feature everywhere."³

The Saint Mary's Beacon reported that "the carnival is novel in its entertainment and also in the fact that while those who spend their money are getting the full value in amusement, the LVFD is getting 50% of the net profits which accrue."⁴

In 1927 the Virginia Amusement Company, an organization of over fifty persons shipped into Leonardtown on July 24th for a week's engagement under the auspices of the LVFD. The lot of Mr. Wm. F. Longmore on Lawrence Avenue had been secured and the carnival opened at noon on Monday the 25th, complete with merry-go-round, a Ferris wheel, numerous concessions, games and a vaudeville show. The Saint Mary's Beacon noted that Johnnie Reh, "who is well and favorably remembered here for his delightful marionettes will be on hand. Twenty-odd years ago Johnnie Reh was a good draw and it is said by those who have seen his presentations of a more recent date, that this clever comedian is at the top of his form."⁵

Following its reorganization in March of 1928 the Department sponsored a vaudeville entertainment at the Town Hall on the evening of June 25th. The Victor Company was to provide an hour and three-quarters of "good high class entertainment." Tickets were on sale at Duke's Busy Corner" for .25 cents and .50 cents and the Saint Mary's Beacon reminded its readers "besides an enjoyable evening an opportunity is afforded to assist the department in raising funds to secure additional equipment."⁶ In October Frank Kerr "Waldorf's active aviator" was taking off and landing his Curtis bi-Plane at the Leonard Hall grounds. (Now the site of the St. Mary's County Governmental Center) Numerous residents of Leonardtown and vicinity were enjoying an air view of what the Saint Mary's Beacon described as "this attractive town." Frank was assisting the Fire department in raising funds towards the purchase of a pumper to be used throughout the County. ^{6a} The Times Crescent of La Plata had recently reported that the "enterprising town of Waldorf" was given a thrill when one of its youthful former residents returned home in his own Curtis Air Plane after completing a seventeen month course in aviation at Seattle, Washington. The adventurous youth was Frank

Kerr, twenty- year old son of Ida M. Kerr a popular Waldorf Merchant. Frank made the trip from Seattle without mishap and would be offering the public short air trips from a field a short distance east of Waldorf. Prior to his decision to take up aviation as a profession he had struck out to see the world and joined the Merchant Marines to meet expenses. In Seattle he had made enough money to purchase his plane by conveying passengers on air trips for hire.^{6b}

The new 600 gallon Seagrave Pumper, the object of the various fund raising activities was subsequently delivered to Pennsylvania Station, Washington, D.C. via train on Friday November 2, 1928. The \$11,000 vehicle was unloaded and brought to Leonardtown by five members of the Fire Department, Roland B. Duke, Barnard I. Smith, Dale Cropper, Frank Guy and Ned Sterling.^{6c}

There is no record of carnivals being held in 1929 and 30 but that's not to say they weren't. Issues of the Saint Mary's Beacon and Enterprise are rather sparse for that period. In August of 1930 after a very successful week spent at Leonardtown with a packed to capacity audience each night the cast of the James Adams Floating Theater held council among themselves, and to show their gratitude remained over Sunday the 31st in order to give a special performance for the benefit of the LVFD. "Mr. Jim Bailey," the most popular play of their repertoire, was repeated and as usual, reported the Saint Mary's Beacon, "the house was sold out long before the hour of entertainment." The sum of \$168.00 was presented to Chief Roland Duke, which he most gratefully accepted on behalf of the fire department.⁷ It was no small amount when one considers that tickets sold for .25, .35 and .50 cents, depending on the seating.

In July 1931 owner, publisher, editor and reporter to the Saint Mary's Beacon, Aloysius Fenwick King reported that a carnival is in full swing on the green in the center of Washington St., under the auspices of the LVFD. A dozen forms of entertainment await. The affair opens each evening at 7:15 with a balloon ascension and acrobatic stunts on a suspended parachute by Major Smith. The exhibition is free the other attractions cost but a dime apiece.⁸ This is the same Major Smith who due to a shift in wind and some unexplained circumstances unexpectedly dropped in on



Seagrave Pumper circa 1928

the 7th District one evening and though, according to local lore, he was eventually found it was not without some difficulty. Editor King continued on: "It is a well known fact that the purchase of our modern fire fighting equipment places the Fire Department deeply in debt. This carnival is being held to help defray the expenses of equipment. Every alarm sent to the fire fighters is answered by them at the earliest possible moment. No matter what part of the County, regardless of the hour or the weather, when the siren sounds out its call for help these men are on the job. Every section of St. Mary's County has sent its appeal and been helped by the fire fighters. Here is a wonderful opportunity to repay in some measure what was done for you. In some instances it has been impossible to save the burning homes and businesses, but the men were there nevertheless to help so far as possible. Are you helping them? It is understood that the cost to secure these attractions and prizes was in the neighborhood of \$1,000. Every cent you spend at the carnival will not only help to defray these expenses but will enable the apparatus to be kept in first class condition and also enable the Fire Department to install additional equipment.

The Volunteer Fire Department located in Leonardtown is a County affair and the people from all sections of the County should attend the carnival. You can have a good time and help a worthy cause."⁹ A week later King reported the Fireman's Carnival "a Splendid Success." All expenses incident to holding the Carnival were cancelled and a very neat sum banked to the credit of the LVFD. "There are still some folks, who think this is a local concept, for the benefit of the townspeople only. Not so. The Volunteer Fire Department has been established to fight the dread demon of fire in any part of this County, and if need be to neighboring ones. They have never refused to answer a call for help and it is their earnest endeavor to help anyone needing their assistance."¹⁰

The year 1932 saw the fireman's carnival being held July 11 thru the 17th. Editor King again reminded the public: "Elsewhere in this issue appears an advertisement of a carnival for the benefit of the Fire Department of Leonardtown and the purpose of this article is to call this advertisement to the special attention of the people of Saint Mary's County, who have been so benefited and protected by the fire fighting machinery and the corps of good men who operate it

so well and so willingly, without pay – the money to be obtained and a goodly sum it must be, if it is to be of any material help, is to apply to the debt our Fire Department has assumed to pay for this machinery and the place to house it.”¹¹

In 1934 the carnival was moved from the village green to the lot of Mr. B. Kennedy Abell opposite St. Aloysius Church. No explanation was given for the move but Father Sheridan Knight S.J., pastor of St. Aloysius invited the public to use the church parking lot. The carnival held June 9 thru the 17th advertised rides games and amusements for both young and old. And noted Editor King: “Judged by past events of a like nature sponsored by this organization, patrons will receive ample returns for their entertainment investment as well as materially helping a very deserving cause.”¹²

In 1935 the Saint Mary’s Beacon reported that commencing Monday August 12th thru Sunday August 18th the LVFD held their annual carnival on the village green. The many attractions featured drew large crowds from every section and the merry-go-round vied with the Ferris wheel as the children’s specialties. The chief attraction was featured twice each evening at 7 and 11 PM, when Professor Legare ascended and descended a spiral incline walking on a huge rubber ball. The 11 o’clock performance was slightly varied with fire works. On Sunday evening a beautiful hand crocheted bed spread, the work of Mrs. Dale Cropper, was won by Miss. Welford Abell of Beachville. The carnival cleared approximately \$1,000.¹³

Cannon Ball Richards was the feature of the 1936 carnival held during the last week of August on the “village green.” The carnival was reported to be a decided success and attended by a great many more people than at anytime hitherto, according to interested observers. The games and concessions were well patronized, as also the stands where edibles and soft drinks were served. An outstanding feature of the entertainment was the marvelous display of strength and resistance demonstrated by “Cannon Ball Richards” specialty act. Mr. Richards, stated the Saint Mary’s Beacon, by careful and intelligent training has succeeded in building up a muscular development that resists the hardest blows from powerful men, and with no protection other than a little tin pie plate to prevent

scars permitted the wielders of an eighteen pound sledge hammer to strike him in the stomach. All these preliminaries led up to Mr. Richards catching a cannon ball weighing 140 pounds, fired from a specially designed cannon, at a muzzled velocity equivalent to several tons. It is really, stated Aloysius King “a very remarkable performance.” At the Sunday afternoon exhibition “Cannon Ball” permitted King, a moving picture fan, to secure several feet of film action. See the following web site for a remarkable film of Cannon Ball Richards.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IH45xpTASiw>

Mr. Barnard Smith, a local electrician and charter member of the fire department, was in charge of the loud speaker arrangement which furnished the music for entertainments and made special announcements. Financially the LVFD reported a gratifying success, netting \$1,600.¹⁴

The Firemen’s Annual Carnival which is greatly enjoyed every year, will be held on the village green commencing on Monday, August 9 and ending on Sunday August 13 reported the St. Mary’s Beacon in its August 6, 1937 issue. Entertainment for the adults included the big-six, race horses and a dice game. For the children it was the merry-go-round, one of the four movable ones left in the United States, and the Ferris wheel which was 10 feet higher than the previous year. There was to be a new attraction, the chair planes but the biggest surprise of all would be the free attraction “Suicide on Wheels” one act to be held at 7PM and the other at 11PM. That same issue of the paper stated that the Popularity contest now in full swing, also sponsored by the Firemen would end on the last night of the carnival. The lady receiving the highest number of votes will receive the first choice of ten major prizes. The next nine ladies receive prizes in the same order. Among the major prizes were a ladies diamond ring, and ladies ensemble, consisting of hat, dress, hose and shoes. “A very nice thing about this election is the fact that no restriction is laid upon the electorate, just the one penny requirement and you may vote your sentiments as long as the pennies last. So ascertain where your local polling place is, select your lady and have your pennies handy and go to it and may there be many to vote early and often.”¹⁵

The 1938 Carnival was again held on the village green and advertised free acts at 7 and 11 PM, but there was no mention of what they were.¹⁶ In its August 18, 1939 issue the Saint Mary's Beacon reported that the Carnival would end at midnight on Sunday leaving only three nights left and the firemen hoping for good weather and large crowds each night. A record breaking crowd was reported for the first night and the crowd each night had exceeded the other. The Carnival Committee, the paper noted, could not have chosen a better free act than the sensational act of "Dare Devil Oliver" which is presented each night at 11 PM. Dare Devil Oliver dives from a ladder 104 feet in the air into a tank of 5 foot water. "It is claimed by those who have seen it to be far superior than any act performed in previous years."¹⁷

The 1940 Carnival was an exciting one and left a lasting impression on then young fire fighters and carnival workers, Kirk Sterling, Clinton Duke, Kennedy Abell and Bob and Jimmy Miedzinski who vividly remembered the aerial artist and his fall from grace. The August 16, 1940 issue of the Saint Mary's Beacon reported the Firemen's Carnival "in full swing on the Village Green, and though Sunday was rainy it failed to dampen the ardor of those interested in helping the cause. The town was crowded and it is hoped when the carnival closes next Sunday night that our ever ready fire fighters the LVFD will have a very neat sum to place to their account. Every penny helps so don't stay home because you haven't much to spend. Ten pennies make a dime, ten dimes a dollar and the dollars -well they make the firemen happy to be able to pay for the new equipment. So come along and do your bit." Capt. Millstead of Baltimore, the aerial artist, who is the nightly attraction of the carnival made his first appearance on Monday. A large enthusiastic crowd eagerly awaited his appearance. Scaling the high ladder he could easily be seen from all around by the huge searchlight rays. The audience watched breathless as he mounted his single wheel, balanced himself and prepared the descent from the 100 foot stretch. He started down the wire, a few feet and the wire slackened perceptibly; a few more feet and a snap was heard as something broke and he fell from a height of 50 feet. He fell to one side of the asphalt road and immediately the observers surged to the spot where he lay, feeling he had broken his neck and killed himself otherwise. Lion Dick Robinson in

his ambulance, accompanied by Fire Chief Duke and several others removed the injured man to St. Mary's Hospital where he was treated. Great anxiety was manifested at his condition but he returned to his family at St. Mary's Hotel Tuesday morning, with a large number of stitches in his scalp and announced that he would appear in his "thriller" on schedule Wednesday evening. The ladder and wire, it was reported, were erected by Capt. Millstead, but a loose wire caused the accident.¹⁸ Capt. Millstead's act, it would turn out, would be the last of the "special attractions" performed on the village green. The Carnival would continue to be held on the green thru 1948.

The raffle that year was a heifer calf and it was won by Bill Redmond, a firemen. His good fortune caused some comment among the public and henceforth firemen were precluded from taking chances on the grand prize. The heifer had been donated by J. Maguire Mattingly, Sr., who at the time was managing Susquehanna Farms at Pearson. He had donated the calf to the Lions Club, who in turn raffled it for the benefit of the LVFD.¹⁹

As the war clouds gathered, the 1941 Carnival would be the last that St. Mary's "greatest generation" would participate in for several years. There would be no Carnival in 1942 and 1943 and when it was resumed in 1944 many of the previous participants were a long way from the "Village Green." The mood of the Country and the County as reflected in the coverage of the Saint Mary's Beacon over the previous year was a change that could be measured in light years. The paper was filled with articles emphasizing the need for military preparedness and contained lists of draftees whose number had come up for a year's service. On December 7th their one year would turn into four years.

The only mention of the 1941 Carnival in the local press is found in the "local happenings" column: "The crowds at the Carnival are very encouraging. Let us hope this year will surpass all others in return for all the hard work our Firemen are doing and will continue to do for all who may need their services throughout the years. They cannot do their best without the necessary equipment which must be kept in good order, and takes money you will admit. We must give them every available means to carry on their

good work.”²⁰ The year did mark the introduction by the Fire Department of its new merry-go-round, thus precluding the necessity of a rental as done in previous years. Built by the Allan Herschel Co., of North Tonawanda, N.Y., the company specialized in producing portable machines which could be used by traveling carnival operators. Purchased in Rutherford, N.J., it was due to freight costs, shipped as “junk” and the weight on the shipping invoice changed from 20,000 lbs to 16,000 lbs resulting in freight costs of \$94.40. It was shipped to the Leonardtown Agricultural Fair and picked up by Barnard I. Smith. A Mr. Oliver traveled to Leonardtown with the ride to help set it up for the 1941 carnival. The original invoice for the merry-go-round, dated July 23, 1941 was given to the Department by Susanne Henderson, a life long resident of Leonardtown, and the daughter of Barnard Smith. It is now framed and situated in the trophy case of the Leonardtown Volunteer Fire Department. The author and that old merry-go-round have a lot in common. We both arrived in Leonardtown in 1941 within a month of one another; spent a lot of time together in our youth and have gone round and round a lot since then and as fate would have it we were both retired the same year (2006).

The Saint Mary’s Beacon of September 1, 1944 ran an add for the Fireman’s Carnival to be held, no longer on the village green, but in the Public Square, from September 2nd thru the 10th. Two or more alarm clocks were to be raffled and there was a \$10.00 prize each night. On Saturday evening the 2nd the Mechanicsville Volunteer Fire Dept. held a “delightful” supper. Since that evening was also the opening date of the LVFD annual carnival, it was decided that rather than postpone either affair, both organizations would pool their profits of that night and divide them. The arrangement, reported the Saint Mary’s Beacon, proved highly beneficial to both organizations.²¹

The 1945 Fireman’s Carnival was held August 11 thru the 19th and “The Country Store”, run by the Ladies Auxiliary of the LVFD with assistance from the Junior Auxiliary members was the latest addition. It was reported from the chairmen in the various districts of the county that many generous gifts had been received to be used as prizes in the “Country Store.”²² Eleanor Fenwick Ripple, who’s Father, Charles Fenwick, was active in the Fire Department,

shared a special memory of the 1945 Carnival. “Daddy and Mama worked at the Leonardtown Volunteer Fireman’s Carnival every night it was open. Budgie (her brother) and I were always there walking, playing or working. One night the church bells started ringing, the fire whistles were blowing and every adult at the carnival was screaming, yelling, jumping up and down and hugging each other. I tried desperately to find out what was going on, but no one would listen to me or pay the least amount of attention to me. Finally I tried to ask Uncle Allie. He was the first adult who even noticed me. He leaned down to me and said ‘The War is over!’ It was August 14, 1945, V.J. Day. I will never forget his kindness to me.”

President Harry Truman had announced the good news to the nation at 7PM that evening. Yank Magazine described the bedlam in New York: “On and on it went into the night and the next night as the biggest city in the world went its way toward picking up the biggest hangover in its history. It was a hangover few would ever regret.” Ditto Leonardtown.

On August 16, 1946 the Saint Mary’s Beacon reported: “When the Leonardtown Fire siren sounds on Saturday night, August 17, at 7 P.M. it will announce the opening of the LVFD Annual Carnival. It will be calling to all those in the County who have the welfare of the County at heart, to join in an attempt to replenish the departments exchequer. Only by contributions and the annual carnival is this very fine and important organization able to carry on it’s work of responding to the calls when fire threatens.” A week later it was reported that the carnival was drawing record crowds each night and if the weather holds out the take will be the best yet. “Folks from every section of St. Mary’s are attending and spending freely on the many attractions offered.” On Monday night when the carnival was in full swing the siren called about 11 P.M. for help at the local ice plant where a pipe was giving trouble. A large crowd rushed down to the wharf and later returned to the carnival attractions.²³

A 1947 Model Frazier sedan to be raffled for the benefit of the LVFD on the last day of the Carnival was on display in the Town Square prior to the opening of the 1947 Carnival on August 9th.²⁴ On Sunday the 17th the Carnival closed after a very successful nine day run. During the last evening many fine gifts were

given away and the best of all was the 1947 Frazier which was won by Mr. Schrey of Spring Valley, Great Mills. The lucky man was routed out of bed to hear the good news. As usual a very neat sum was added to the organizations treasury.²⁵

The 1948 carnival held August 7th thru the 16th would be the last to be held on what prior to the War had been called the Village Green but was now being referenced as the Public or Town Square. A 1948 Pontiac, donated by the merchants of Leonardtown was raffled and won by Miss Ruby Bishop of Lexington Park. Other prizes included a \$100 War Bond won by Raymond Wible of Hollywood, a \$50 War Bond won by Stephen Vallendingham and a \$25 War Bond won by Mr. T. Webster Bell of Leonardtown.²⁶

From 1949 thru 2005 the LVFD Carnival would be held each July on the Carnival Lot located on Lawrence Avenue and Shadrick Street.²⁷ In 1949 Shadrick street had just been completed and it was noted that the street as well as the area around the carnival lot had been blacktopped. The street was named in honor of Tommy Shadrick, a local boy who had lost his life in the South Pacific during the War while serving with the Army Air Corps.

At mid 20th Century the Saint Mary's Beacon

GO TO
LEONARDTOWN
BIG TIME
JULY 5-6-7-8-9-10

GIGANTIC FIREWORKS JULY 5
 Merry-Go-Rounds Plantation Shows Ferris Wheel Animal Show Concessions, Etc.
FREE ADMISSION TO MIDWAY

Old-Time Fiddlers' Contest
Popularity Contest

Charleston Contest
Baby Contest

BIGGEST WEEK EVER HELD IN ST. MARY'S COUNTY
 Benefit Leonardtown Volunteer Fire Dept.

Advertisement
 (St. Mary's Beacon, June 25, 1926)

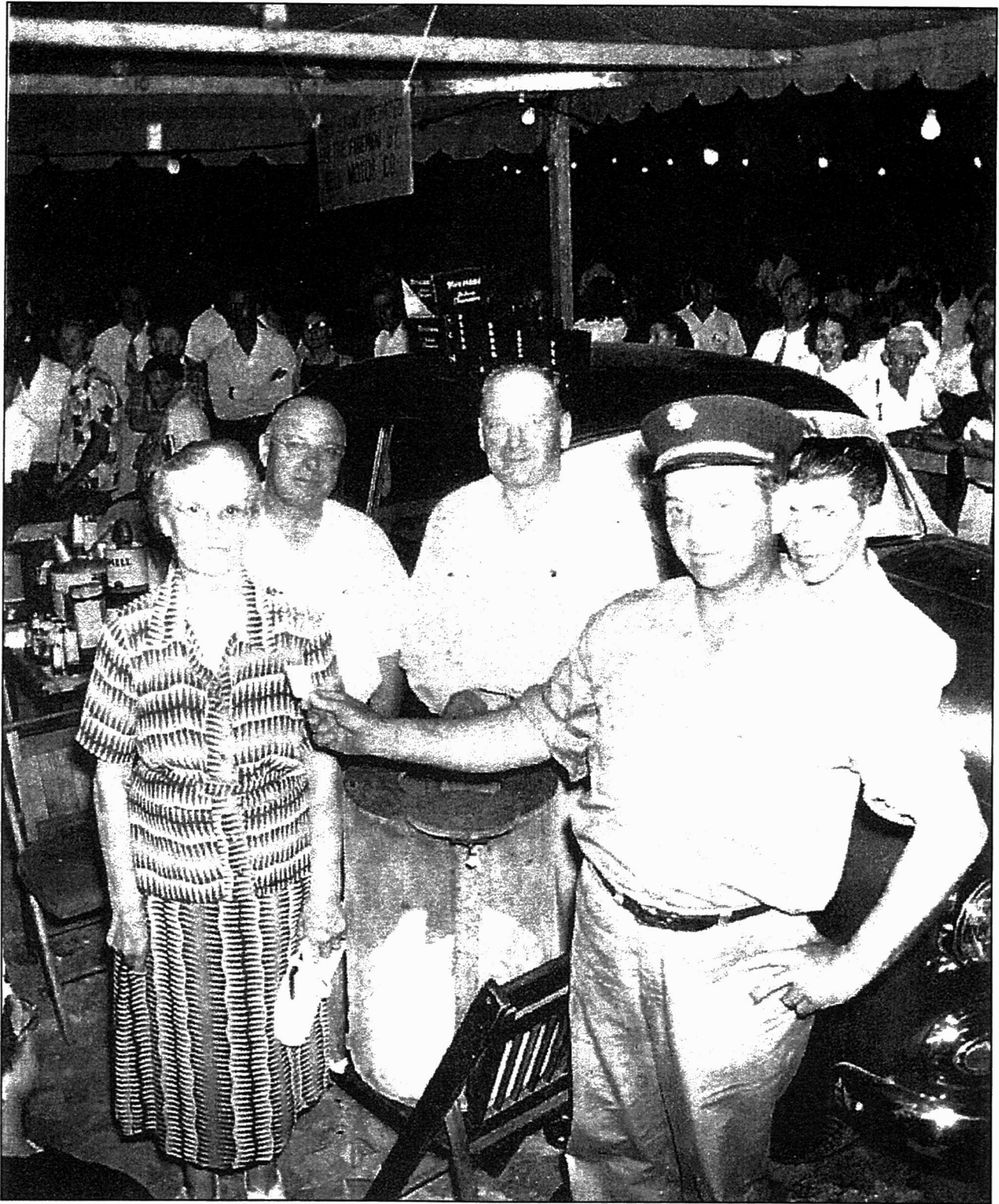
would report that the proceeds of the 1950 Carnival would go towards the purchase of a new truck and a two-way radio. "Good old Betsy, the LVFD first truck will be retired to a life of ease (she will only be used in emergencies) after the new truck is received. Maybe you think a new truck won't cost much. Indeed it will, but the County needs one and every penny you spend will help make the dollars that are necessary to purchase the truck. Come out, have a good time and help the LVFD that they may help others who are not having a good time when a fire occurs on their premises."²⁸

For Seventy-five summers the Leonardtown Volunteer Fire Department Carnival held forth providing summer entertainment to countless thousands of citizens and numerous generations and in the process provided the economic means for the Department to build a volunteer fire department second to none. Times however change as do the generations and with the implementation of a County wide fire tax some years back the carnival, though always financially successful, became less essential for the economic well being of the department. In March of 2006 by a majority of two votes, the membership voted to do away with this long running tradition. Look for it no more my friends it has gone with the wind.

Leonardtown Volunteer
Fire Department
CARNIVAL
AUGUST 12 to 21 Inc.

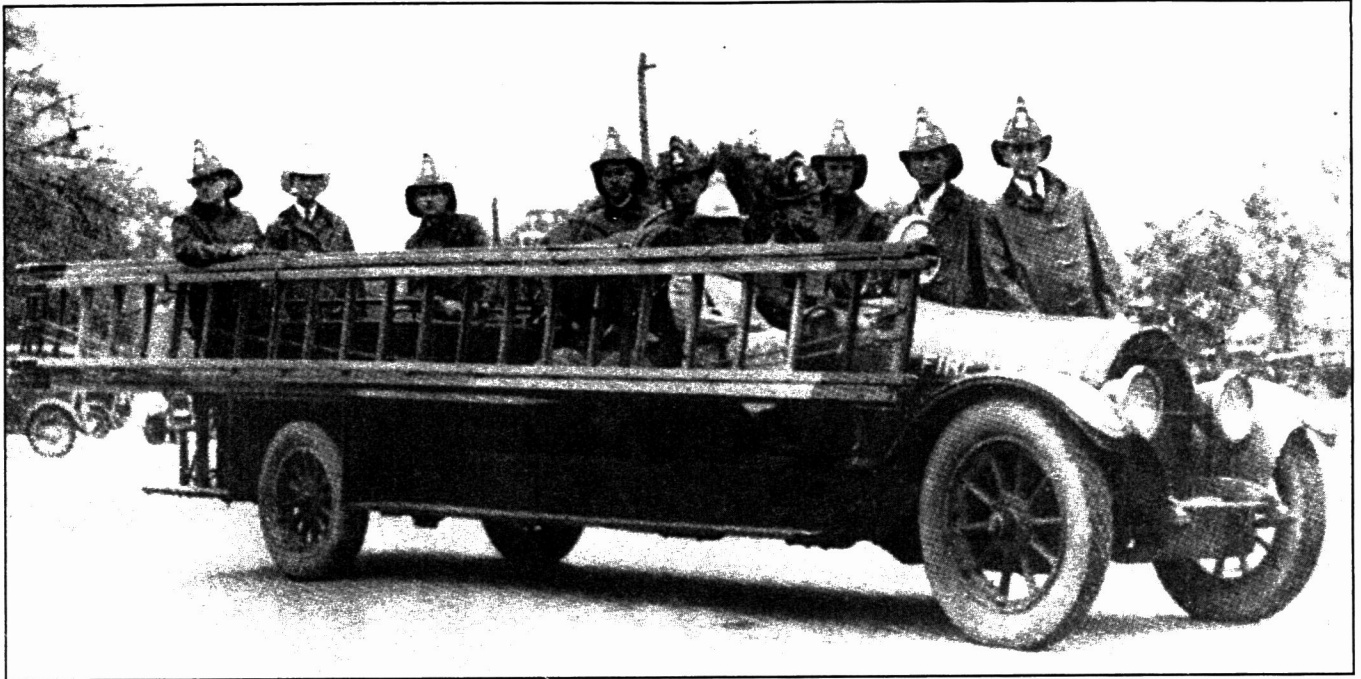
ON CARNIVAL LOT AT LAWRENCE AVE. AND SHADRICK ST.
MERRY-GO-ROUND — FERRIS WHEEL — LOOP-O-PLANE
GAMES OF ALL KINDS AND MANY NEW ATTRACTIONS
FREE GIFTS DONATED BY COUNTY MERCHANTS
TO BE GIVEN AWAY EACH NIGHT
1950 PLYMOUTH TO BE AWARDED LAST NIGHT OF CARNIVAL
PROCEEDS WILL GO TOWARD PURCHASE OF
NEW FIRE TRUCK AND TWO-WAY RADIO

Advertisement
 (St. Mary's Beacon, August 11, 1950)



The Winner is...

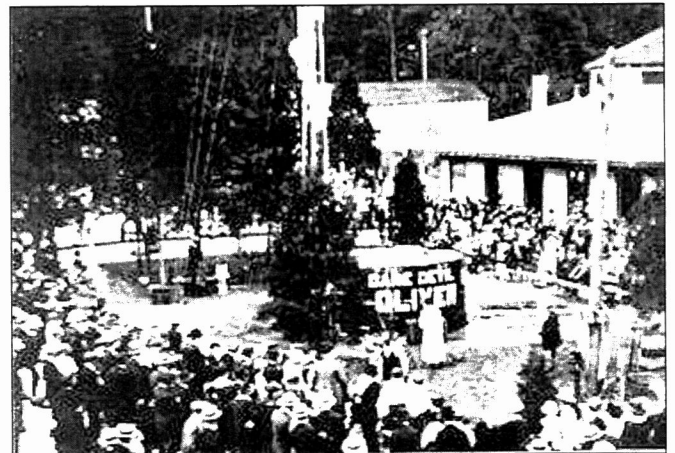
Mrs. Martha "Lula" Russell Raley, wife of George L. Raley of Lawrence Ave., Leonardtown is the lucky winner of a 1951 Chevrolet. Fireman and later sheriff Robert Miedzinski drew the winning ticket on the last night of the 1951 Carnival. Looking on are Webster and Ernest Bell who for many- many years were fixtures at the carnivals' car stand. Franklin Aud who was working at the car stand is standing behind Robert Miedzinski (Robert was the father of James (Jimmy) and Robert L.). For a number of years in the late 1940's and early 50's George L. Raley played Santa Clause at Morgan's Department Store in Leonardtown.



"Old Betsy"

References:

- 1 St. Mary's Enterprise, September 19, 1925
- 2 St. Mary's Beacon, April 27, 1928
- 3 St. Mary's Beacon, June 25, 1926
- 4 St. Mary's Beacon, July 9, 1926
- 5 St. Mary's Beacon, July 22, 1927
- 6 St. Mary's Beacon, June 22, 1928
- 6a St. Mary's Beacon, September 28, 1928
- 6b Times Crescent, September 28, 1928
- 6c St. Mary's Beacon, November 9, 1928
- 7 St. Mary's Beacon, September 5, 1930
- 8 St. Mary's Beacon, July 10, 1931
- 9 Ibid
- 10 St. Mary's Beacon, July 17, 1931
- 11 St. Mary's Beacon, June 24, 1932
- 12 St. Mary's Beacon, June 8, 1934
- 13 St. Mary's Beacon, August 23, 1935
- 14 St. Mary's Beacon, September 4, 1936
- 15 St. Mary's Beacon, August 6, 1937
- 16 St. Mary's Beacon, July 15, 1938
- 17 St. Mary's Beacon, August 18, 1939
- 18 St. Mary's Beacon, August 16, 1940
- 19 Ibid
- 20 St. Mary's Beacon, August 8, 1941
- 21 St. Mary's Beacon, September 8, 1944
- 22 St. Mary's Beacon, August 10, 1945
- 23 St. Mary's Beacon, August 22, 1946
- 24 St. Mary's Beacon, August 8, 1947
- 25 St. Mary's Beacon, August 22, 1947
- 26 St. Mary's Beacon, August 20, 1948
- 27 St. Mary's Beacon, August 12, 1949
- 28 St. Mary's Beacon, August 11, 1950



A "small tub of water"

Leonardtown Fireman's Carnival Notes

by Al Gough

“Old Betsy”

Leonardtown's first fire truck was a Ford Truck chassis purchased from the Leonardtown Implement Company in November of 1925. By 1928 with additional fire fighting equipment being added the engine proved inadequate to carry the load. Providence intervened when a bootlegger wrapped his Cadillac Touring car around a telephone pole while racing through Leonardtown. The front half of the car was not damaged. Barnard Smith and Dale Cropper came into possession of the remains. They proceeded to cut the Ford Fire Truck in half and married the Cadillac engine to the Ford Chassis and thus “Old Betsy” was born.

Clinton B. Duke, Sr.

President LVFD 1966; Lifetime member (30 years active membership) as of August 10, 1987. Inducted into the Southern Maryland Volunteer Firemen's Association Hall of Fame, May 6, 2000; inducted into the Maryland State Firemen's Association Hall of Fame in 2002. For many years served as Fire Chief of Patuxent River Naval Air Station and was well known over the years to thousands of school children for his efforts in fire prevention playing the roll of “Sparky” the Fire Prevention Dog.

James F. Miedzinski

His father put him to work at the carnival as soon as he was old enough to count change. Lifetime member (30 years active service) as of August 14, 1978; 50 year member as of 1998; inducted into the Southern Maryland Firemen's Association Hall of Fame, May 1, 1999.

Robert L. Miedzinski 1930 - 2012

President LVFD 1982; Inducted into the Southern Maryland Volunteer Firemen's Association Hall of Fame, May 1, 1999. He began serving with the Leonardtown Volunteer Fire Department at age 14 in 1944 and remained an active member of the LVFD until the time of his death with the exception of the time he spent in the Air Force (1952-56). Bob, has of this writing, the distinction of being the oldest, longest serving active duty member of any volunteer fire department in St. Mary's County. During his sixty-seven year association with the department he served as president, vice-president, assistant engineer, recording secretary, treasurer and at the time of his death was holding the position of corresponding secretary. He was also recognized as a permanent fixture as the Ferris wheel operator at the LVFD carnival, a job he loved.

Walter Kirk Sterling

Chief, LVFD 1959, 1960, 1965; Lifetime Member (30 years active service) as of January 1973; Inducted into the Southern Maryland Firemen's Association Hall of Fame May 5, 1990.

B. Kennedy Abell, Jr.

Chief, LVFD 1955, 1956; President 1968 – 1976; Lifetime Member (30 years active service) as of November 8, 1976; Inducted into the Southern Maryland Firemen's Association Hall of Fame May 5, 1990.

Frank “Cannonball” Richards February 20, 1887 – February 7, 1969

Richards “exploded” onto the Vaudeville entertainment scene with his remarkable act and “bombastic” belly in 1932. He began his career by letting people (including heavyweight champion Jack Dempsey) punch him in the gut. He then progressed to letting people jump on his belly, being struck by a two-by-four, being struck by a sledgehammer, and finally being shot by a 104 lb cannonball from a spring loaded 12 ft. cannon. Richards limited his cannonball act to twice a day as performing it more often was too painful. (Wikipedia) He was the special attraction at the 1936 LVFD carnival. For actual footage of his cannonball act see Frank Cannonball Richards on YouTube – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IH45xpTASiw>

Henry Francis Pilkerton "The Popcorn Man" 1896 - 1960

Member of the Leonardtown Volunteer Fire Department from 1935 – 1960. Hundreds of Children knew him as "Mr. Popcorn" since he always operated the popcorn stand at the annual carnival. He last worked his stand in July of 1960 and passed in September of that year. It seems like it was just yesterday.

LVFD Carnival, Early Forties
by Kennedy Abell, 1/7/2011

[Editors' Note: The following were some notes written down by Kennedy Abell in 2011

The front page sketch of the Carnival was done by Kennedy from the roof of the then County Trust Bank]

Located on the north park to include the north roadway from Fenwick St. to the Roland Duke House. Wooden framed canvas covered game stands along the west side of the park. A large bingo stand framed and canvas tent like with little wooden stools for players. More stands along the curb from Harry Jones Store, now branch Bank of America up to St Paul's Church. Charlie Fenwick managed the Food Stand selling Hot Dogs and cool drinks, orange and grape. The Merry Go Round was on the south end of the park with the Ferris Wheel in the middle of the road on the north portion of the highway. Barnard Smith owned a four door Oldsmobile or Buick painted silver like all of his business trucks but which was used as a sound car for announcements and advertising during the week throughout the county with large speakers on top. Each year they had special entertainment act late at night. Cannon Ball Richards, Very Large man and huge stomach would first let anyone hit his stomach with a sledge hammer. Then a real cannon ball fired into his stomach. Others were high wire towers diving into a ten foot round water tank in the other park. One other who was new placed at or in the corner of Sterling's yard next to Col. Duke's yard. He was to hang by his feet and ride a rope down into the park among the crowd. Kirk & myself were to stop him by holding a large blanket just in front of the wooden crossed end of the guide line. As he descended his weight lowered his line and he hit a telephone wire which flipped him out of his hanging from the sagging rope to the road.

The carnival was started in the thirties and once was held in the lot next to my house. They rented the Ferris Wheel until about 1945-46. They learned to erect it on the end of the present carnival lot. They had purchased the Merry Go Round and [I] have the purchase order & understand there was a black gentleman, who knew how to erect and maintain the ride, that came to Leonardtown along with the ride! The first raffle was a bull donated by Bill Redman a fireman at the time who was the winner and there was some contention. Thereafter the department did not let any fireman take chances on the main raffle for many years.

Now days if the firemen and auxiliary don't take chances there would not be as much gained from their raffles. The carnival equipment was an income in the forties for many years as Mr. [Sheriff] Robert Miedzinski managed hauling and operating the carnival for other volunteer fire departments such as Seventh District, Lex. Park, Indian Head, Prince Frederick, Solomons and at night we would have to drive around Upper Marlboro to return as the ferry did not run late at Benedict!!!

**"I can remember that man jumping into that tub of water"
(Peggy Schlosser, Tudor Hall, June 22, 2012)**
