“Anti-Union” County?

“The County road workers have done a good job of keeping our roads open in the winter, and it isn’t their fault we do not have new roads. It’s the fault of the rich people in Garrett County because they are the only ones fighting progress … Also, they fight the Union because they know if the road workers goes Union, they will have to pay their employees more money and that would really hurt because they can’t bear to part with an extra dollar. Some business people in Garrett County still only pay their employees $5.00 a day for an 8-hour day and that isn’t right because I worked for a lady at the Lake [Deep Creek Lake] 10 years ago and she paid $1.25 an hour then.

"Some people who are fighting against the Union [own] houses that rent from $40.00 to $45.00 a month and they aren’t fit for people to live in let alone pay for.”

July 9, 1970 letter to *The Citizen*, July 9, 1970 from Ruth J. Lloyd, Kitzmiller.

The strike and its aftermath placed the “union question” squarely before the residents of Garrett County. Would AFSCME’s organizing success foster a more favorable environment for unions in Garrett County? Would the new AFSCME unit grow its political influence, credibility, and power, or would it remain isolated?

By 1970, nonunion strip mines had replaced nearly all the underground mines in Garrett County. Unlike Cumberland, with its large industrial plants, Garrett County still had only a few smaller factories where workers belonged to unions, including Sterling Processing [poultry] in Oakland, Garrett Manufacturing [garments] in Deer Park, and Flushing Shirt Co. in Grantsville.

Other union members taught school, worked for the State of Maryland, C&P Telephone Co., or the local utility.

The clout of the county’s wealthiest businesses and their anti-union policies were widely acknowledged by residents on all sides of the roads conflict, including Commissioner Sines, who contrasted his own meager resources to the wealth of the Naylor family.

“I could have qualified for food stamps myself [during the strike],” said Sines, who recounted how the Naylor family acquired hundreds of mortgages of families

and businesses during the Depression, eventually owning a significant percentage of the county's private residences and business structures.

Alonzo Drake "A.D." Naylor, the founder of the family's businesses, was born in 1861 and died in 1965 at the age of 104. The son of a blacksmith opened a store in Oakland in 1898, selling farm implements and supplies.

When he died, Naylor was in his 24th year of service as a director of First National Bank, the oldest bank director in the United States. He had served two terms in the Maryland House of Delegates and one term in the Maryland State Senate. James "Smokey" Stanton, who grew up in Oakland, recalled images of Naylor into his 60s and 70s walking through town, still attired in a black suit and vest and carrying a cane.

Naylor's relationships with the county's working classes encompassed a complex mixture of respect and resentment. The lending policies of the local banks, heavily dominated by Naylor and a few Garrett County business leaders, were widely criticized. Residents cited cases where would-be entrepreneurs applying for credit to launch businesses were turned down, only to see the bankers themselves invest in similar ventures or offer their own notes to the denied customers.

The road strike deepened the perception that there was too much power in too few hands. "I think Naylor and Browning and Feld from HP Stores met in the back room [about the roads strike]," said Herb McCrobie, former chief roads engineer. McCrobie said he didn't like unions but blamed the strike on the stubbornness of the commissioners and their willingness to follow the lead of the county's wealthier businessmen.

Smokey Stanton said a small core of business and professional men and women made *all* major decisions on the county's investment and development. He said that entrepreneurs and politicians in other Garrett County towns, including McHenry (the business center of Deep Creek Lake), were always subordinate to the powerful business folks in Oakland.

Joe DeSimone, born in 1924, the son of Italian immigrants, typified the mixed consciousness toward Oakland's business class. DeSimone's father worked as a union trackman for the B&O Railroad for 42 years. Steering clear of his dad's heavy manual work, DeSimone worked in the Naylor family's businesses for 21 years. In 1978, he ran for Registrar of Wills and served in that office for 30 years.

DeSimone managed Naylor's "lower store" (hardware) and then moved up to manage their Rolyan's outlet (clothes etc.), opened on Third St. in Oakland across from the courthouse in 1958 by A.D. Naylor's grandson, Howard.

While running Rolyans ("Naylor" spelled backwards), Howard Naylor served on the Oakland City Council and as a director of First United Bank. "Howard was a great businessman," said DeSimone. But, while praising his old employers, DeSimone said, "This town has always been against unions." He cited the hostility toward a union drive at Browning's Foodland where his son worked alongside his son-in-law Harry Biggs.

"I think the roads strike happened primarily because they [town leaders] were so dead set against unions," said DeSimone. "The workers thought they would have more speaking power. There wasn't going to be a meeting of the minds …

"It [the strike] was illegal, but they were changing times and [the county] wasn't ready. This area is hard to accept new things…There were pluses and minuses to unions. They did a lot of good things and some bad things."

In 1961, Howard Naylor moved his family to Boise, Idaho, where he and his wife Audrey resumed careers as full-time teachers. Michael Naylor, Howard's son, was born in 1948. He attended the University of Washington in Seattle, then returned to Oakland and worked in the family business for four years. He said he didn't recall hearing about any union activity at Naylor's holdings.

"I would like to think that the company took good care of its employees. My grandfather and my Uncle Allen would have been resistant to a union," said Naylor, whose parents formed the Howard and Audrey Naylor Foundation, a key funder of the Garrett County Transportation Museum and college scholarships in the region. Ironically, Bartlett Naylor, another of Howard Naylor's sons, served for a time as director of corporate affairs for the Teamsters Union.

"It stands to reason the Naylors, Brownings and Felds opposed the strike because they were against unions in their own facilities," said Tom Bernard, a real estate broker and contractor, who gave striking union members the use of a building to set up their clothing and food distributions.

Before he went into real estate in 1971, Bernard, like DeSimone, worked for Howard Naylor. Howard was a "prince of a fellow," said Bernard. "He treated me good. Those [Naylors] were all good people to me."

"If I ran into Art Naylor (A.D. Naylor's son), he was liberal with advice. I'm attracted to successful people and people who work hard." Bernard added, "I never had a jealous bone in my body. Some business people say when a [competitor] goes down, it's good for them. But, if a company goes down, it hurts me. When a smaller company goes down, the community loses. I want everyone to be better off."

Asked about the local business leaders, retired roads worker Tom Holler shook his head, recounting the story of a roads department co-worker who took a vacation in Florida. While there, he bumped into one of Oakland's leading businessmen, who said, "What are *you* doing here? Maybe we're paying you too much money."

During the strike, the wife of Local 1834 leader Ernest Friend worked for HP Stores, the Maryland and West Virginia chain run by Irvin Feld of Oakland. Her son Jeff, the former president of Local 1834, acknowledged the anti-union bias of the county's business leaders, but said, "The Feld family [store owners] showed no animosity towards my mother [during the strike]."

Buck Fike began working as a lineman at C&P Telephone Company (AT&T-Bell Systems) in 1968, a member of the Communications Workers of America. He retired as a technician for AT&T's successor, Avaya. His father, too, had worked for HP Stores.

Irvin Feld and his wife, also named Audrey, lived a block away from Fike's childhood home. "They were elite people, but still down to earth," said Fike, who said he had many discussions with Irvin and considered him a friend. "There were very few unions in the area except for the coal miners."

While businesses, including HP Stores, opposed unions, sometimes the unions were "their own worst enemies," he said, citing an incident that occurred after the roads strike.

Fike had two brothers-in-law who worked in union mines. He remembered hearing that a no-smoking rule had been consented to by the union during negotiations. But one week after the contract was signed, a union member violated the policy and was disciplined. Despite the agreement between the parties, the workers engaged in a wildcat strike protesting the discipline. "That [kind of conduct] reflects badly on unions," said Fike.

"There's such a small upper class in Garrett County," said Harry Biggs, Joe DeSimone's son-in-law, a long-time teacher at Southern High School in Oakland. Biggs went to work as a human resources manager for Browning's Foodland after a brief time on a union job in Westvaco's paper mill in Luke, where his family had worked for three generations.

Like other residents on both sides of the strike, Biggs expressed respect for some of the wealthy business owners who were deemed "self-made" through arduous work, like Carl DelSignore, the strip-mine owner.

Biggs echoed Bill Fike's description of local ire toward union miners, recalling the United Mineworkers striking one winter, raising the price of coal for local

families. “Workers at Shaffer Ford [dealership] were making half the pay [of coal miners on strike],“ Biggs said. “The resentment was like when the baseball players went on strike.”

The attitudes of County residents toward unions were also influenced by a steady influx of Western Pennsylvania union steelworkers and their company managers. Before the construction of I-48, [later renamed I-68] drew the wealthier strata of second-home owners from Baltimore and Washington, many of the cabins around Deep Creek Lake were owned by steelworkers and other blue collar families from Western Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania steelworkers were among Johnny Marple’s regular clients for fishing bait. After returning home from post-Korean War military service as a radar operator, Marple started selling worms to Deep Creek Lake fishermen, setting his bucket by the side of the current Rte. 219.

His father, a meter engineer at Columbia Gas and an original investor in Wisp Resort, signed a note to buy property that his son established in 1953 as Johnny’s Bait House. Johnny’s welcoming persona and humility hooked generations of vacationers, with the bait house becoming a landmark reproduced on post-cards and Kodak photos.

Marple and other business owners directly benefited from the rising tide of prosperity collective bargaining was bringing to their steel mill patrons.

“Steelworkers made good money. And they were easy people to get along with,” said Marple, who recalled I.W. Abel, the former international president of the United Steelworkers, who owned a summer home nearby and bought ice and newspapers at Marple’s store.

Local pharmacist Ernie Gregg, a Republican, began his political career by defeating Ross Sines, who was attempting a comeback in the 1978 Republican primary election for county commission. Gregg served two 12-year terms on the commission.

“Some business people [during the strike] were hesitant to see an ‘avalanche’ of unions.” But the county, said Gregg, had a lot of outmoded [road] equipment. “I remember Delwood Freeland [a roads worker] with icicles hanging off his arms throwing cinders from the back of a truck. That kind of treatment should have been inconceivable.”

Gregg grew up in Preston County, W.Va., where his father worked as supervisor in both unionized and non-union mines. He said he took pride in establishing a constructive relationship with AFSCME Local 1834 during his tenure as a commissioner.

However, he opposed the union's drive for state-sanctioned collective bargaining, saying, "People in the county just weren't interested in that."

Turmoil and Change

In coming negotiations with AFSCME Local 1834, Hamilton and his fellow Democratic commissioners, all experienced businessmen, would reflect the county's dichotomy regarding unions, business, taxes, and collective bargaining.

Before the next round of negotiations with the union, they went to work reviving delayed efforts to establish a comprehensive plan and a measure of regulation over the economic growth of the county. The process was a prerequisite for the county to qualify for more federal and state dollars to improve its infrastructure and sustain a powerful wave of real estate and business development.

"The strike was an example of the axiom that, 'You create change by creating turmoil,'" said Duane Yoder, president of the GCCAC, who retired in 2023. The shift in the political situation [after the strike], he said, created the county's first strategic planning effort.

Yoder's management of GCCAC's diverse housing and social service programs was recognized by peers across the United States.

"I can't imagine that change happening without the dramatic change [the strike precipitated]," said Yoder. "The homogeneity of Garrett County retards our progress."

Few could have anticipated that the turmoil of a strike and roads in disrepair would be the catalyst for a new brand of political leadership in Garrett County. Whatever their partisan affiliation, most of the county's business leaders knew that the parochial, conservative worldview of Sines, Friend and their closest supporters was incompatible with the economic growth of the county and their own dreams of greater prosperity.

The foremost conflict facing Hamilton and the Democratic commissioners would be fought on the planning, zoning, and infrastructure front. The Bausch and Lomb deal had shown that even penny-pinching, "anti-government" conservatives like Sines and Friend would support using eminent domain and taxpayer funding to develop infrastructure.

The decision to dam Broadford Run to make a reservoir supplying water to a big new workplace was, after all, a common-sense proposition, even if it meant condemning some private land for public purposes.

However, achieving a more comprehensive development plan would test the county's distrust of regulation and Hamilton's political savvy. He would need to delicately build a credible, respected coalition of stakeholders, drawing together leading business owners with influential local farmers and politicians from the smaller towns to challenge the county's conservatism.

Simultaneously, the Hamilton commission needed to modernize the county's administration and bureaucracy and hire new professionals. Such efforts were essential to enable Garrett County to better share in Maryland's prosperity.

The alternative would see the county slipping into the poverty of neighboring West Virginia, where crossing the border from Maryland could be like going from the U.S. into Mexico, with sturdier homes giving way to rickety trailers, Maryland's better-maintained roads leading into gaping potholes.

Residents bemoaned the noise and the traffic of a growing tourism industry. Many of the lake's traditional blue-collar vacationers and fulltime residents expressed nostalgia for the informality, closeness and modest accommodations that drew them to the county, notwithstanding the struggles of the region's own working class.

Geography drove the inevitable change. Maryland is the only U.S. state with no natural lakes. No glaciers ripped across the swath that became Maryland, scooping out an abundance of natural lakes that, in other states, invited vacationers and sportsmen.

Michigan, for example, has thousands of miles of glacial-carved lakes and abundant shorelines. Well into the 2000s, the Wolverine State was sustaining lakefront vacation communities as modest as Deep Creek Lake was in the 1950s – populated by successive generations of autoworkers and other working-class families coming to fish and water ski.

By contrast, Maryland's lack of lakes and the affluence of the surrounding region precipitously lifted the market value of Deep Creek Lake's 65 miles of shoreline. No one could stop the forces of change at play. Outside wealth was arriving and longtime local entrepreneurs tasted newfound prosperity.

What would Deep Creek Lake and Garrett County look like five or six decades later?

Many influential local business leaders were ready to work with the Hamilton commission to improve their ties with state and federal agencies, build the county's infrastructure, attract new businesses, and widen the tax base.

Business leaders knew they would need to allay the locals' deep-rooted skepticism of state and federal policy to qualify the county for funding from

programs developed by the Nixon White House (1969-1974) and the still new administration of Maryland Gov. Marvin Mandel (1969-1979).

Even while the strike raged, Bausch and Lomb was recruited to Garrett County from New York State and began construction of the 165,000-sq. foot manufacturing plant that would eventually employ hundreds of workers and managers.

Credit for recruiting and nurturing Bausch and Lomb went primarily to the Garrett County Development Corporation, formed in 1961 and led by Army Colonel J. Haig Jackson, who operated a Ben Franklin thrift store in Oakland. Born in New Jersey in 1913, Jackson graduated from high school in Lonaconing, Allegany County, in 1930. His decorated military career included construction of the longest tactical bridge across the Rhine River at Mainz, Germany.

The development corporation had a checkered history. In the early 1960s, its leaders convinced the county to extend a loan to an entrepreneur who said he would use the money to set up a sewing shop to produce clothing. The prospective owner had exaggerated both his expected clients and credit. He failed, leaving the county with a building full of sewing machines to sell.

On at least one occasion, a leader of the development commission was forced to divest from a company after lobbying for county money to support his silent interest in the enterprise.

By contrast, J. Haig Jackson, who served as an Oakland city council member, as a director of Garrett National Bank, and chairman of the board of Garrett Regional Hospital, was untainted and widely trusted. He was ready to work with Wayne Hamilton and his commission. Development Corporation leaders like Irvin “Bob” Rudy Sr. were there to help. Rudy’s business-first, partisanship-last approach typified the relationships between many in the business community and the new commission.

A WWII-era veteran, Bob Rudy Sr. was the son of a Kitzmiller resident who arrived in Oakland in 1921 to work in a dry goods shop. He ended up buying the shop from its owner and became a leading businessman in the town.

After returning home from Army service, the younger Rudy, born in 1926, worked in the store, took over for his father and began to form a chain of alliances with other entrepreneurs, including Helmuth Heise, the founder of Wisp Ski Area and Resort.

While operating a ski shop at the resort, Rudy became a key member of the Deep Creek Lake-Garrett County Promotional Council, the precursor of the Mountain Top Chamber of Commerce, which he served as president.

“Garrett County’s economic expansion was like a ‘pick up’ ball game. Coalitions were formed project-by-project with visionaries like my father bringing in the players who could make them happen,” said Bob Rudy Jr., who, in 2025, was still running the family business 104 years after its founding.

”My father was amazing. He was wickedly smart, and he had a way of telling the story [of a project] in a way that people could visualize it,” said his son. The elder Rudy attended Western Maryland College for two years. But “book learning slowed him down,” said his son. In later years, the elder Rudy “got so tied up in [development] projects, the management of his own businesses came second.”

“People are always putting political labels on progress,” said Rudy. “Never in my life did I hear my father utter about one of his colleagues, ‘He’s a Democrat or he’s a Republican.’”

Partisanship never got in the way and businesses would invest in one another in hard times, said Rudy. One snowless winter, for example, his father and Willis Shaffer, owner of Oakland’s Ford dealership, invested money in Wisp to help keep solvent the resort’s developer, Helmuth Heise. Their investment gained them equity interest in the resort.

County commissioners usually were only asked to support new development initiatives once “all the ducks were in a row,” said Rudy. A supportive climate for business was the entrepreneurs’ main political objective. Rudy said his dad and some of his business allies knew they would often be contending with stubborn commissioners like Ross Sines.

“We’ve always had a ‘stray’ commissioner on the board,” said Rudy. “Everybody knew who he was. It wasn’t unusual.”

Building Infrastructure

In Dec. 1970, one month after the settlement of the roads strike, President Richard Nixon signed an executive order establishing the Environmental Protection Agency. In its first year, the agency was budgeted for $1.4 billion and employed 5,800. As more federal grants for improved water treatment and sewage disposal systems were offered to states and counties, Hamilton and the newly elected commission needed to better position Garrett County to qualify for the funding. That meant overcoming nearly a decade of inertia and outright resistance to planning, zoning and investment in modern sanitation systems.

Federal water regulation had begun in 1948. But Maryland's battle over clean water went back at least five decades earlier when, in 1897, oyster packers in Baltimore and on Maryland's Eastern Shore blocked the state from dumping sewage into the Chesapeake Bay to protect their fishery.

Extraction industries were as central to Garrett County's economic base as seafood was to the Eastern Shore's. Following the lead of the mine owners and logging companies, county residents and their municipalities mostly dumped raw sewage directly into the Youghiogheny River and the county's other rivers. They burned household, industrial and farm trash or dumped it in nearby woods.

Garrett County's retail business leaders, like the oyster packers at the turn of the century, were concerned over water pollution's threat to their profits. Environmental damage could undermine the county's tourism and real estate sectors. Regulations were needed to stop haphazard dumping and leaking septic systems around Deep Creek Lake.

In June 1962, Lowell Loomis of the county development corporation requested the county's sanitary sewer commission conduct a survey of waste disposal. The commission approved a $1,000 appropriation for the study. It would take some persuasion by trusted, homegrown experts like Edgar Harman to take the next steps.

Harman had come of age on a dairy farm in The Cove, a spectacular expanse of hills, valleys and farms that awes today's visitors to the county from an overlook on Rte. 219, heading into Accident. One year after the waste survey, he returned home to Garrett County from Baltimore, where he'd been working.

Harmon had graduated in 1954 from Northern High School in Accident, then attended the University of Maryland, majoring in dairy technology. Upon graduation, he worked for a time for the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Beltsville as a bacteriologist on a Cold War-inspired project investigating how to remove Strontium 90 from milk in the wake of a potential nuclear attack. He served six months in a U.S Army artillery unit, joined the U.S. Army Reserves and then got a quality control job at Green Spring Dairy in Baltimore.

"When you get out of high school, you want big city life," said Harman. "But I had enough of the big city. So, I applied for an opening at the local health department in Garrett County as associate to chief sanitarian Charley Miller. I got the job and replaced Miller when he retired."

At the time of his hiring, no towns in Garrett County had sewage systems. Grantsville had a large septic system, but the wastes it held were poured into the Casselman River.

“Wildcat dumps” were everywhere, said Harman. Unregulated dumping, he recalled, “came under great scrutiny as the whole country paid more attention to the environment, noting a memorable public service ad in the early 1960s portraying a Native American chief shedding a tear as people threw trash out of moving cars.

He recalled nagging disputes between Loch Lynn, Mountain Lake Park, and Oakland over whether to combine forces or go it alone in sewage and water treatment. Oakland had been the county’s economic center. But the town offered the most resistance to investment in sanitation.

Harvey “Hub” Swartzentruber, the Oakland harness shop owner and former county commissioner (1954-1958/1962-1966), was elected mayor of Oakland in 1968 and served for 10 years.

Swartzentruber told his constituents that raw wastes deposited directly into the Yough would be “oxygenated in the rapids.” Swartzentruber’s water treatment solution was “a rock in the Yough,” said former county administrator Marshall Rickert, who remembered pipes of raw sewage pouring directly into the Little Yough behind Oakland’s historic B&O train station.

Swartzentruber’s predecessor as mayor, Russell Smith, the owner of Chimney Corner Restaurant in Red House, south of Oakland, personally flouted environmental regulations at the restaurant, pouring waste into a nearby creek. His environmental irresponsibility drew the attention of the health department and the farmer just up the road, Wayne Hamilton.

Hamilton knew change was imminent. He consulted with state officials on how to move forward on meeting the standards for water quality mandated by the Solid Waste Disposal Act of 1965, passed during the administration of President Lyndon B.Johnson (1963-1969).

New Wave of “Flatlanders”

To win federal and state assistance, Hamilton, Harman and others needed to hire grant writers and planners, educated administrative professionals.

The strike had brought union “outsiders” into Garrett County from Baltimore. They had come and gone, leaving images and stories that would in time be all but forgotten. But the political shift from the turmoil of the strike and the burgeoning economy of Garrett County now invited a new group. They were self-labeled by a newly arrived attorney, Tom Dabney, as “flatlanders,” men and women who stood

out for not having shared the challenges of growing up in rougher, more adverse physical and cultural terrain.

Eclectic and mostly young, they came from college campuses, the Peace Corps, the Vietnam War, and the medical and legal professions. Some would leave after a few years. But others stayed and built relationships with the county's native leaders, forging alliances with Hamilton, J. Haig Jackson, Bob Rudy Sr., the Naylors, Brownings and other Garrett County families of the World War II generation.

In short order, these alliances changed the look, feel and future of Garrett County, challenging a measure of the homogeneity that Duane Yoder said, "retarded the county's progress."

Smokey Stanton recalled the profound changes of the early 1970s. Stanton's mother and father were fifth-generation Garrett County residents. His paternal ancestors arrived after the Civil War and worked on the railroad. His grandfather was chairman of both the Oakland City Council and the board of education and had run for sheriff. His mother, Beryldine Fulk Stanton, was elected Oakland's town treasurer.

Stanton was drafted for U.S. Army service in the summer of 1969 while attending West Virginia University. He served in Germany as a social worker with the mental hygiene service of the Third Armored Division, assisting service members suffering from substance abuse. He graduated from WVU the year he was drafted.

Stanton returned home from the service in 1972. One year later, he ran for a city council seat in Oakland and won. The night after the election, Stanton received a call from an incumbent council member asking him to run for president of the council against the current president and council member Col. J. Haig Jackson, the county's economic development chairman.

Stanton did and won. At age 27, he was the youngest county council chairman in the state. Among other responsibilities, the council president sat on the board of directors of Garrett Memorial Hospital.

Stanton, who had just begun service as the county's first alcohol addiction counselor, received a call from Ken Richmond, the hospital's CEO. Stanton said Richmond told him, "When I got up this morning, you were my friend. Now you're my boss [hospital board member]. We were counting on Haig Jackson being re-elected."

Stanton said his election, the encouragement by a group of elders to seek greater responsibility, and the surprise at the speed of his ascent to influence were emblematic of the period.

"The old guard was moving out," said Stanton. They weren't necessarily protective of their power and many of their decisions were pretty good."

The county's future leaders and outsiders were disrupting the normal channels of succession. Some of the service clubs in the southern part of the county had always done their own mentoring of future community leaders.

Stanton said members of the Oakland Women's Civic Club, which included his mother and the wives of many of the town's professionals, saw their role as preparing the members of the Junior Women's Civic Club to take their places.

Stanton said class dynamics were at play as the more affluent "lace curtain Irish" members of the Civic Club sought to pass their values on to the younger, more working-class girls, derogatively labeled the "bicycle Irish."

The Lions Club launched an effort to mentor younger men that was similarly condescending. But the "orderly transition" of community leadership was "going away," said Stanton. The influx of young, educated men and women would provide new role models as teachers, professionals, and entrepreneurs.

"A crowd of younger couples was moving into Oakland," said Stanton. "They were progressive, thoughtful, assertive, and caring. We were all products of John F. Kennedy's idealism."

The elders and the newcomers—who included faculty members and administrators at the new community college—would quickly and successfully "knit together two different world views."

"To get an idea of the magnitude of the influx," continued Stanton, "My wife, Sandra, and I would hold three or four parties a year. Without exaggeration, we hosted 30 couples, all new to the county, including lawyers, doctors, social service professionals, teachers, and others."

Most of the newcomers settled in or near Oakland. Distinctly different groups developed in the northern end of the county, mostly concentrated in Friendsville, drawn more to kayaking, farming, and joining the era's counterculture than regular 9 to 5 jobs in offices.

"The newcomers to Oakland had a sense of preserving history and many bought older houses and began restoring them," said Stanton.

Dave Beard

“I guess you could call me an outsider, but I never felt like I was unwelcomed. Maybe it was because I taught most of the kids in town,” said retired Southern High School (Oakland) history teacher and former Garrett County Commissioner Dave Beard.

“I was raised in Allegany County and my family goes back to 1638 in Washington County. That was 134 years before Garrett County was formed,” said Beard.

Born in Mt. Savage, an hour northeast of Oakland, Beard’s father worked in local brick and glass plants and his uncles in the Kelly Springfield Tire Co., Celanese Corp. and in the railroad yards, all with union representation.

“My mom thought I should drop out of high school and join my uncles,” said Beard, “but I kind of enjoyed school.”

He graduated from Allegany High School in 1959, the first in his family on either side to get a secondary school diploma and then went to Frostburg State Teachers College (now Frostburg University). After graduating from Frostburg, Beard was assigned as an apprentice teacher. But schools weren’t hiring until July or August.

“My wife, Beverly, and I had two kids in diapers and I needed to work,” said Beard. He worked for four years as an assistant supervisor in boys’ forestry camps, juvenile detention centers occupied predominantly by Black downstate youth. He joined the Maryland Classified Employees Association and was elected president of its chapter.

Beard said he was “only about two years into teaching” at Southern High School when the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) broke away from the GCTA. “The GCTA allowed administrators to be part of the bargaining unit. We considered them a ‘company union,’” said Beard, who was elected president of the AFT local at the school.

Beard served on the Democratic Central Committee and first ran for county commissioner in 1977. “I decided I wouldn’t win, but I felt like I needed to try. I was appalled at the lack of information county residents were receiving from the commissioners,” he said.

Beard ran for commissioner three times as a Democrat, before deciding to run as a Republican. “I am more ‘middle of the road’ on political philosophy,” he allowed. “Democrats said I was too conservative. Republicans said I was too liberal.” He finally won a commission seat in 2007, in his third try as a Republican.

“One of the first things I wanted to accomplish as a commissioner was a college scholarship program for high school seniors,” said Beard.

Because farming families often owned large and valuable parcels of land going back generations, their children were often ineligible for Pell grants (federal subsidies incorporated in the Higher Education Act of 1965). “Most farmers don’t make a whole lot of money. They weren’t going to list the farm as an asset to be put up for sale to send their kids to college. Their brilliant kids deserved a chance,” he said.

Working with fellow commissioners Ernie Gregg and Fred Holliday, Beard contacted Dr. Steve Herman, president of Garrett Community College, Duane Yoder from GCCAC and Jim Hinebaugh, the county’s economic development director, later a county commissioner and state delegate.

Since 2007, the Commissioner’s Scholarship they developed [renamed the Garrett County Scholarship Program], has been committing revenue from property taxes—boosted by expensive homes around Deep Creek Lake—to offer free tuition to Garrett College for all graduating high school seniors in Garrett County.

At the time of its establishment, the only county in the nation with a similar program was one in Tennessee, sponsored by a local employer. “Many counties downstate asked for our [plan] and copied from us,” said Beard. Allegany County ended up with a similar scholarship program using money from their casino at Rocky Gap.

Looking back on his teaching career, Beard said, “The 1970s were a great time. I felt like Southern High’s staff was as good as any, with strong science and English classes. When I talk to students who went on to college, some of them tell me they were so well prepared they were tutoring other first-year engineering students.

New Administrators

Marshall Rickert, a native of Wicomico County, arrived in Garrett County in 1971. A Johns Hopkins University graduate, Rickert was drafted into the military directly after receiving his diploma.

He served in the U.S. Army in Vietnam. “I had served in a pretty nasty environment. I [came back home] totally lost. There was no thought given to post traumatic stress,” said Rickert, who applied to a few graduate schools but “never followed through.”

“I had an interest in effective municipal government from my dad, who was commissioner of recreation for Wicomico County [Maryland’s Eastern Shore],” said Rickert. A Veterans Administration program offered to link the skills of

veterans with public needs. Garrett County was looking for a planner. Rickert, then 25 years old, traveled west and was hired after an interview with Col. J. Haig Jackson.

Rickert said he was astounded by some of the differences between the Republican Garrett County of that time and Democratic Wicomico County. He recalled seeing Garrett County's roads workers on the job just after the settlement of the strike.

"I never saw public employees treated to such poor working conditions," he said. And, while the Eastern Shore had its own deep history of racism, Garrett County's bigotry in that era was often more openly expressed, reflecting white settler descendants who had never dealt with a growing, influential Black population, like there was in Wicomico.

He recalled his father, who encouraged the racial integration of the Wicomico County Recreation Commission, attending a conference at Nemacolin Lodge in Oakland in the 1950s. The elder Rickert was accompanied by one of its members, a Black woman. The wives of the men attending the conference ended up serving food in the buffet line, said Rickert, because the lodge's white women servers stopped work when they saw a Black woman in the food line.

Rickert's military background and rural Maryland roots might have given him some credibility, but young Rickert said his father told him he still had to "earn his respect" from Garrett County leaders who were part of the Greatest Generation.

His father's experience helped him build bridges. Born in Canada, the elder Rickert had dropped out of school at age 12, left home and worked in factories, living in a tent for a time before being offered shelter by a schoolteacher and her husband. He re-enrolled in school and earned his high school diploma in three years. He won a full scholarship to Harvard University where he majored in recreation studies, then joined the military.

"My father's mentorship helped "craft" my relationships with men like Wayne Hamilton, who, he said, "set out on every front to make things better in Garrett County from labor to management to economic development."

But Rickert knew he also needed to build alliances with other baby boomers returning to the county, including those who had opposed the war in which he fought. They were a growing lot. A 1971 Harris poll claimed 60 percent of Americans opposed the Vietnam War. On May 3, 1971, the year Rickert arrived in Garrett County, 12,000 anti-war protestors were arrested as they disrupted government and business operations in Washington, D.C.

Rickert roomed with Garrett County native Duane Yoder upon Yoder's return from Eastern Mennonite University. Rickert, who attended Vietnam language school and worked as an advisor to the South Vietnamese Army, bonded with Yoder, who had served time in prison for refusing to cooperate with the Selective Service.

If Rickert didn't fit the war hawk stereotype of some, Yoder, the anti-war Mennonite, couldn't be typecast either. "Duane could have received a religious deferment as a conscientious objector," said Rickert. But, instead, he resisted the draft. "I respected that."

Rickert recalled breakfasts over "coffee and sticky buns" with Duane and his older cousin, Lowell Bender, a Garrett County native recently back from conscientious objector service in Yugoslavia.

They were joined by Dave Ramsey, a Beaver Falls, Pa. native recently arrived with his wife, Sara. The Ramseys had served in the Peace Corps in Bolivia. Sara, a Birmingham, Alabama native, later taught at Southern High School. Dave worked for GCCAC, where he initiated a program entitled "Operation Mainstream," serving men who had been unemployed for 18 months or more, providing training in carpentry and bricklaying.

The program participants helped build local fire stations. Ramsey also volunteered to work with the Southern Garrett County Rescue Squad and helped the county develop 911 services. He was instrumental in establishing ambulance services to replace the funeral home hearses the county used to transport patients.

Marshall Rickert and Dave Ramsey talked politics – war and peace, zoning and sewage, tourism and industry, trading philosophies and strategies of government and governance. Rickert laughed as he recalled his breakfast arguments with Ramsey, saying he drew Ramsey's ire when he suggested that the Army's work in pacification programs in Vietnam's villages mirrored the work of the Peace Corps.

Joining the breakfasts was Tom Jones, a Frostburg University graduate and Western Maryland native hired by the county in economic development. Rickert called Jones a "wonderful friend and a terrific foil." He recalled delivering impassioned testimony at a hearing where he referenced the example of a "7-Eleven" store. Jones upbraided Rickert after the meeting for not realizing that most folks in Garrett County had "never seen or heard of a 7-Eleven."

Lowell Bender was born in 1940. His parents moved to Garrett County in 1950 from Pennsylvania and bought a farm in Bittinger. Recalling the breakfast

brainstorming sessions in Oakland's Proudfoot's Pharmacy with Yoder and Ramsey, both of whom he had hired to work at GCCAC, Bender said: "We would have our friendly disagreements. But we never harbored any ill will [over politics or strategy]."

On several occasions, Bender accompanied the county's development leader, Col. J. Haig Jackson, to Washington County for meetings to establish a tri-county council with Allegany and Garrett.

"Col. Jackson knew I was a conscientious objector," said Bender. "But we never talked about that. In terms of worldview and outlook, we were miles apart. I listened to his war stories, and I tried to understand the positions he was in [during the war]. We didn't allow differences of opinion to interfere with our work."

Reflecting upon the differences between Jackson and Bender, Rickert said the Colonel was "one tough SOB." He recalled Jackson saying he won his first Purple Heart as commander of a Civilian Conservation Corps work detail, when, after he was attacked by a CCC worker, he killed his adversary with his hands.

Gary Mullich, a native of New Windsor in Carroll County, Maryland, arrived in Garrett County in 1973. He had graduated from the University of Maryland, where he majored in transportation and business administration.

"I was hired initially to put in a rural bus system," said Mullich. The financing was funneled through the county's Commission on Aging. Upon his arrival, Mullich heard stories of prior commissioners like Sines and Friend who spent scant time lobbying the county's delegates and their fellow legislators in Annapolis.

In stark contrast, he said, Hamilton, Opel and Guy became players in the state capital. Encouraged by Mullich and other newcomers who studied government policy, the new commissioners deepened relationships with Gov. Mandel and other Democrats.

"The push for developing, modernizing and bringing Garrett County into the twentieth century was based on economic development," said Mullich, who later became the county's first director of general services.

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The county's new professionals received a mixed welcome from residents. "I made a point of joining the Lion's Club and the Rotary Club to be part of the community, said attorney Tom Dabney, a New York City native who arrived in 1972 with his wife, Dayle, after working at Price Waterhouse in Baltimore. While he

attempted to become part of the community, Dabney said, “I had a beard and lawyers were not supposed to have beards.”

T.R. Janes, another attorney, arrived in 1974 from Baltimore, where he had worked for the Legal Aid Bureau. Janes, who grew up in a small town in Illinois, said he and his wife took a drive to Garrett County, saw a house they liked on Pennington St. and “hung around” Oakland for a few months.

“We were like hippies,” he said. After Janes expressed interest in remaining in the county, a local accountant advised him, “The first thing you need to do is get a haircut. And if anyone asks you if you smoke dope, say no.”

Janes visited Judge Stuart B. Hamill at Oakland’s courthouse and discussed prospects for lawyers in the county. While Hamill’s family had deep roots in the legal profession, Janes said, “Garrett County wasn’t like a [big city] where most of the partners in law firms were second and third generation members.”

Janes built relationships with a few local lawyers, including Dwight Stover, the attorney who represented the county commission during the roads strike. Attorney Jack Rush Turney, another friend, formerly represented both the road workers association and the Hamilton board of commissioners.

Turney, a Korean War veteran, said Janes, typified the uniqueness of the county’s legal professionals. “Jack Turney’s hobby was working alone, cutting pulpwood and hauling it to the paper mill,” said Janes. “I told him I heard that was a dangerous hobby. He told me it was safer working solo.”In 2025, at age 92, Turney was still serving as an Orphan’s Court judge.

In 1976, Bobby Enten, an attorney from Baltimore, joined Janes’ practice, staying in Garrett County until 1981. After leaving the county, Enten became one of the leading lobbyists in Annapolis. Later, Janes teamed up with Leonard Eiswert, son of a Baltimore steelworker, who moved to Garrett County in the 1980s and was appointed a District Court judge in 2008. Eiswert retired in 2013 and remained in Garrett County until 2022.

No incoming professional enjoyed a more wholesome welcome than the county’s new general practitioner. On Feb. 1, 1973, *The Republican’s* front page reported, “Oakland at long last will have a new physician to aid the hard working and overworked doctors already here.”

The newspaper introduced readers to Dr. Thomas Johnson, 26, a nearby Uniontown, Pa. native who had graduated from University of Pittsburgh’s medical school and completed an internship in Roanoke, Va. “He’s a very nice fellow. We’re very happy to have him,” Dr. Joe Alvarez, Garrett County’s general surgeon, told *The Republican*.

Alvarez's imprimatur was golden. He had built a powerful reputation for care and competence, even performing emergency brain surgery on a patient who he couldn't get to a specialist on time. In 1972, Alvarez began construction of a new 50 X 80-foot brick medical center, adjacent to Garrett County Memorial Hospital, with the goal of attracting new doctors like Johnson to join the county's six physicians and four dentists.

Dr. "Tom" Johnson, 78, who retired in 2023, built a reputation for physical prowess, completing the "Diabolical Double," a one-day 125-mile bike race, enduring 16,500 feet of total elevation, part of the county's Gran Fondo competition.

The emergence of new physicians in Garrett County wasn't without controversy, despite the pressing need.

Dr. Bill Pope graduated from Stanford University Medical School in 1961. Pope had interned in the American hospital in the Panama Canal Zone, completed military service with the public health service in Texas, and spent two years in Hong Kong screening immigrants for tuberculosis. Returning home, he joined the staff at Provident Hospital in Baltimore.

In 1971, he was appointed Garrett County's chief medical officer. While he was hired as an administrator, Garrett County still had a shortage of doctors. Pope went to work practicing medicine and assisting efforts of Dave Ramsey and others to establish ambulance services in the county.

"Every community wanted their own doctor," said Pope, who proposed the building of community health care centers in the county's largest towns. Grant money was available from the Appalachian Regional Commission. Pope said his advocacy for community health flowed from a message delivered to Congress in February, 1971 by President Nixon.

In February 1972, *The Republican* reported that the Garrett County Medical Society opposed Pope's proposal for community clinics. While "unanimously recognizing the inadequate number of physicians and dentists in the county," the newspaper reported, the physicians were concerned about the proposal's "threat of socialized medicine" and the potential for "high costs, dictation of policy, inefficiency and indifference to patients."

"I never fit in well with the community," said Pope, who, with his wife, Fran, an expert birder, joined what he called a "small, circumscribed group" of bird watchers.

Years later, the cross-country runners and skiers who joined the clubs Bill Pope started and the girls he coached in soccer would likely challenge Pope's claim about not "fitting in".

Despite other physicians' opposition to Pope's community clinic proposal, the Grantsville Area Health Center opened in 1975, financed by local contributions, funds from federal and state agencies and the Appalachian Regional Commission. Dr. Dan Nofziger, who had been practicing in the area since 1973, moved into the health facility.

Wayne Hamilton needed all the counsel he could muster from his new appointees and the town's legal and medical professionals. But he also needed a bi-partisan coalition of sophisticated, effective, and respected citizens to support his commission's initiatives and deepen his influence in Annapolis. The local Democratic Club lacked deep influence in the county. And men still held all the leading jobs in county government.

Into the void stepped the determined and progressive members of the Garrett County League of Women Voters (LWV), formed in 1969. The group provided crucial help in modernizing the county's politics and building consensus on critical initiatives launched by the county commission and the local business community.

League of Women Voters

Born in Cumberland in 1930, Dorothy "Dottie" Leighton served as the first president of the League of Women Voters in Garrett County. Serving alongside Leighton were Robin Walters (Mt. Lake Park), vice president; Barbara Flinn (Oakland), secretary, and Alice Anne Ridder (Oakland), treasurer.

Leighton's maternal lineage descended from Rev. Samuel Chapin, an early settler of Massachusetts Bay Colony, whose progeny included the financier J.P. Morgan, the abolitionist John Brown and singer-songwriters Harry Chapin and Mary Chapin Carpenter.

Dottie Leighton's mother was the daughter of a Presbyterian minister, a college graduate who lived in Washington, D.C. Her family vacationed in Mountain Lake Park. Before Dottie's birth, her mother worked at the Smithsonian Institution. Later, she helped found the Garrett County Chapter of the American Association of University Women. (AAUW).

Dottie Leighton's daughter, Ann Leighton, a retired county librarian, said, "I think my mother's politics partially stemmed from seeing all of her brothers serving in WWII, with one of them killed before the Battle of the Bulge."

She added that her mother "had strong feelings that our country stood up against Nazi Germany and that our country had to be about democracy."

Married to Oakland obstetrician Dr. Herbert H. Leighton, Dottie Leighton taught music for many years in Keyser, West Virginia. Partnering with the wives of other town physicians, she successfully fought to overcome the county's ten-year opposition to sex education in the public schools.

"She was particularly concerned with young girls having babies," said Barbara Morris, who moved to Garrett County in 1971 from Boston where she had worked with the LWV.

After the battle for sex education was won, Morris became one of the first two teachers of the new "family life and human development" curriculum in the Garrett County Schools. Morris's sister-in-law, Ginny Morris Grove, an LWV member, who moved to Garrett County in 1972, said, before the intervention of Leighton and the LWV, local sheriffs refused to investigate complaints of domestic violence, labeling such conflicts as "family affairs."

Leighton organized study groups to better understand the workings of the nation's political system. The group collected information, publishing a brochure entitled, "Know Your County." The LWV set up a booth at the County Fair, staffed a float in the Autumn Glory Festival Parade, and was soon attracting high-energy recruits among the new arrivals.

Dayle Dabney fondly recalled partnering in LWV activities with Meg Stevens, another newly arrived resident she had met during their brief time teaching together at Friendsville Elementary School. Dabney said many county newcomers were just starting families. The women mostly talked about their children, said Dabney. "In some ways, Meg was a traditional mother. But she always talked at a much higher level [than the newcomers and the locals]," said Dabney.

Mary Margaret "Meg" Stevens (later Galligan) was born in 1945 in Washington, D.C. She attended boarding school in Alabama where her father worked as a scientist at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville. After graduation from Immaculata University in Pennsylvania, Stevens worked as a reporter for the Montgomery County (Md.) *Sentinel,* alongside the future *Washington Post* reporter Bob Woodward of Watergate fame. She married another reporter, Chuck Stevens, and moved to Garrett County where Chuck's

parents owned a farm on Frazee's Ridge and Chuck Stevens set his sights on raising calves for veal.

Stevens joined the LWV and the Garrett County Democratic Club and soon was a dominant, colorful presence in both organizations and at Garrett County Board of Commissioner meetings.

Barbara Morris, who moved to Garrett County with her husband Dick, remembered partying with Meg Stevens at her in-laws' farm on Frazee's Ridge. "At 1:00 a.m.," said Morris, "Meg would turn the party into a board of education meeting."

Alice Stevens, Meg Stevens' daughter, said her mother didn't adjust easily to rural life.

Recollecting her life in Garrett County for her daughter, Meg Stevens drew a youthful image, sitting on the porch of the farmhouse on Frazee's Ridge with her mother-in-law. A truck approached. Her mother-in-law said, "Here comes the sacks truck." Meg Stevens told her mother-in-law she was surprised "Sax [Fifth Avenue] delivered out here."

"Meg Stevens was at the ramparts," said Marshall Rickert. She was "a genuine character, great fun, Irish as you go." Rickert recalled Stevens sitting in the corner of the chamber during county commission meetings, taking notes. She took county school budgets home and analyzed the payroll, then informed the commissioners what she learned.

"She was brilliant, an excellent writer, "said Rickert. The commissioners appointed Stevens to serve as the commission's clerk.

"Meg Stevens was Wayne Hamilton's brain," said Rickert. "She encouraged the commissioners to 'act like big boys,' taking responsibility for the budgets." Rickert said it was mostly historic gender bias that kept her from filling the county administrator job to which he eventually was promoted. And Meg Stevens reminded him of the gender disparity.

Dottie Leighton, Meg Stevens and Dayle Dabney interviewed candidates for political office. They produced special LWV inserts for *The Republican*, listing the candidates' stances on the issues. The group sponsored "meet-the-candidate" events on Sunday afternoons at Garrett County Community College, covered by the local radio station.

"Residents would show up with questions for the candidates [drawn from reading the league's inserts]," said Tom Dabney. As director of the LWV's environmental committee, Meg Stevens helped organize forums to support

Hamilton and his planning commission's efforts on zoning and improved water treatment.

Dayle Dabney established a pre-school in the basement of St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Oakland, partnering with Lynne Malone Elmlinger, a teacher who grew up in the town. She contrasted Stevens' feminism with the conservatism of the county. Dabney, a native of Towson in Baltimore County, said she knew she was in a "little bit of a foreign place" as she phoned women to support her husband's campaign for state's attorney. Dabney said many women told her they "always voted how their husbands voted."

Some residents condemned the prominence of Democrats in the League's work. In 1974, Rev. W.H. Leake, who had run against Delegate B.O. Aiken in 1970 as a representative of the rightwing American Party, challenged the League's impartiality in a paid ad in *The Republican*.

A Marine Corps veteran of the Korean War, Leake accused League members of censoring questions he had presented at a "meet the candidates" night.

Leake wrote: "[The League of Women Voters] is supposedly non-partisan, but I do not know any that are active in this 'mini-LIB' group that are not liberal...I shall continue to keep an eye on this liberal group and expose their hypocrisy."

Countering Leake's label, Dottie Leighton decided to run as a Republican for the House of Delegates.

Willetta Lambert Mateer, who served as Leighton's campaign treasurer, said, "I was Dottie's best friend. I was in the background helping her. She was very progressive, had a passion for politics and was ahead of her time."

Mateer, a native of Tucker County, West Virginia, had moved to Garrett County in 1961 with her husband, Paul Mateer, a forester for the State of Maryland. After attending Garrett Community College, she entered a distance-learning accounting program at Syracuse University, one of only two women in a class of 50. She then established a CPA practice in Oakland.

Mateer remembered some of the county's residents criticizing Leighton for challenging tradition and the roles of women. "I remember [during Leighton's unsuccessful campaign] some people saying Dottie was a 'spoiler' or that her husband was a doctor, so she didn't need the money the House of Delegates position would pay," said Mateer.

Dayle Dabney said she and other recent arrivals stayed active in the LWV, but after some of their children entered school, "We put a huge focus on education." A graduate of elite Maryvale Preparatory School in Baltimore County, Dabney accompanied other transplants to board of education and PTA meetings.

Before her first trip to Friendsville, where she was assigned to teach elementary school, Dabney said, “People in Oakland told me the town was like Dodge City [Kansas], a wild frontier town.”

She recalled being alarmed at the sight of men walking around town with rifles. But, she said, “It was a wonderful teaching year.” Most of the children had never been in a preschool program and she enjoyed conducting home visits to assess their educational needs.

Lynne Malone Elmlinger, Dabney’s partner in the Oakland pre-school, worked on the inside to improve the county’s schools, following her father’s example. She was born in 1946 in Barbour County, West Virginia, where her father, Darrell Malone, worked in his family’s coal business.

After attending Alderson-Broaddus University in Philippi, West Virginia, Darrell Malone became a school principal and won a Republican seat in the state’s house of delegates.

Former U.S. Sen. Robert Byrd, a Democrat who served in the West Virginia House of Delegates during that era, threatened to defeat Darrell Malone’s re-election bid if he didn’t cease his support of racial integration in the state’s businesses. Malone held his ground and lost his seat. He moved to Oakland in 1955, served as a guidance counselor at Northern High School and was elected president of the Garrett County Teacher’s Association.

“My father was about social justice. So was I,” said Elmlinger, who attended West Virginia University in Morgantown, earning her teaching certificate in 1971. In 1974 her father died and she moved back to Oakland.

“Hot Dogs, Beer, Cigarettes and Politics”

Tom Dabney recalled meetings, picnics, book clubs and nights out with newcomers and some locals, most of whom wanted to help bring local politics more in line with Maryland’s Democratic majority.

“There was only one movie theater in town at Red Run Inn, with adjacent restaurant space for about 50 or 60 people,” said Dabney.

Small groups of residents would meet there for dinner. But, he said, more engaging were the informal parties at the Stevens’ farm on Frazee’s Ridge where, over “hot dogs, beer and cigarettes” there were “big, but civil fights” over politics heading into the wee hours. Some of the discussion spilled over to the book club.

“I remember being part of a book club with Barbara Morris, Dave and Sara Ramsey and Kathie Smith and her husband, Manning Smith, an Episcopal rector,

all newly arrived full-time residents," said Elmlinger, who, in 1975, took over as educational coordinator for the Garrett County's Head Start program.

Years later, book club members, including the Ramseys, Marshall Rickert, Duane Yoder, and Tim Dugan couldn't recall what books were discussed. "The club and the books were mostly just excuses to talk politics," said Tom Dabney.

Barbara Morris, a native of Montgomery, Ala., had finished one year of law school at Boston University before she moved to Garrett County in 1971. Her husband, Dick, a Cleveland, Ohio native and Vietnam veteran, had received his MBA from Harvard University in 1970. Dick's parents owned a cottage in Thousand Acres on the southern end of Deep Creek Lake.

The couple lived in the basement of the cottage after their arrival. Dick got a job as a construction laborer, Barbara found work as a legal assistant. Dick's boss encouraged him to hire his own crews to build a "spec" house and sell it. Dick Morris became a contractor, building 100 homes in Garrett County, later starting a firm that produced prefab housing units.

"Dave and Sara and others [members of the book club] were very patient with us," said Barbara Morris. She and her husband were both from Presbyterian homes where, she said, "Our view of the world was 'Christians against communism.'"

Dick Morris, with a sociology degree from Haverford College, held liberal views on domestic race relations. But unlike some of his book club peers, Dick, a Bronze Star-decorated First Calvary rifle platoon leader in Vietnam, was still "a war hawk," said Barbara Morris.

"We had a picture of Nixon and Agnew on our wall," she added. "I can't remember how all the information [from the book club and other sources] connected," said Barbara Morris.

After the 1971 publication of the *Pentagon Papers*, the U.S. military's history of the Vietnam War, "Dick changed his mind about the war."

The book club, she said, filled the county's communication void. "The mountains blocked communication signals, so we did not have adequate news until we got cable connections."

Locally, we had WMSG Radio, owned by Tom Butscher. "The station, with no pun intended, butchered the news," said Marshall Rickert.

Dick Morris's prefab business failed in the recession of 1981. The couple moved to Prince George's County, Maryland. Dick was hired as a researcher for the National Association of Homebuilders and died in 2017 after a long fight with cancer, presumptively caused by wartime exposure to Agent Orange.

During his 10-year retirement, he wrote five novels on “social justice themes,” said Barbara Morris, who in 2025 was holding book talks in her retirement community in Prince George’s County and maintaining a blog about Dick’s writings and experiences.

Kathie and Manning Smith arrived in Garrett County in 1974 from Charleston, W. Va. Kathie had vacationed every summer in Mountain Lake Park. In the late 1800s, her great grandparents were part of the Mountain Lake Park Association, along with other residents of Wheeling.

A full-time resident of Wheeling, her father worked for Wheeling Steel, later Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel. Her mother’s family owned a department store there. Manning Smith served as the Episcopal rector of St. Matthew’s Church in Oakland until the late 1980s.

“We moved here [Western Maryland] in 1974 when certain reactive groups were taking books out of libraries in Charleston and in Garrett County,” said Smith, who joined the LWV.

“The groups found the books to be un-Christian and unsuited for their children or anyone's children to be exposed to,” she said. Manning Smith died in 2020. In 2025, Kathie Smith was one of only three remaining Mt. Lake Park residents whose families had roots in the Mountain Lake Park Association.

The Underground Church

Pastor Rich Seaks, a York County, Pa. native, arrived in 1972 to serve St. Mark’s Lutheran Church in Oakland. He had served for seven years as assistant and associate pastor of Ascension Lutheran Church in Towson, Md., where he had gotten to know Dayle Dabney.

“I quickly became enamored with other people who came from outside of Garrett County who were making waves, ‘good waves for the most part,’ in a very conservative climate,” said Seaks.

A group of us were questioning our religious beliefs,” said Lynne Elmlinger, the WVU graduate who had started the day care center at St. Marks with Dayle Dabney. Rev. Seaks invited Elmlinger, her former husband, Dan Elmlinger, Dave and Sara Ramsey, and about 20 others to form what they labeled an “underground church” at St. Marks.

“My perception,” said Seaks, was people like Lynne and [the others] had “faith in their heads and hearts, but no church to draw them in.”

Seaks made the basement of his church, with room for their children to play nearby, available for a “discussion group that invited people to share their faith, vent their frustrations, dream their dreams and search for a faith that was honest and was world-centered and word-centered.”

Joining the members of the “underground church,” said Seaks were an elderly couple, Eugene and Dorothy Straub, who were, he said, “well-traveled, ‘people-people,’ whose maturity was a gift to all of us.”

Eugene Straub, a Naval officer and son of a railroad worker, was born in 1914. He met his wife, Doris Eckley Straub, a Naval intelligence officer, during WWII. Straub, who served as assistant director of the Navy National Security Division at the federal Office of the Budget, spent vacation time with his wife restoring their family’s cottage in Garrett County.

In 1970, Straub, 56, retired from his job and pursued a master’s degree in environmental engineering at Catholic University in Washington, D.C. and moved to Garrett County. He later served as the first instructor in government at Garrett Community College.

The 70s, said Seaks, “were an amazing time of shifting sands in Garrett County.” While he said he was “keenly aware” of longtime residents who always reminded newcomers they had “Garrett County mud on their shoes,” he said, most people “realized we were in the same place at the same time and should make good use of it.”

As an example, he pointed to members of the Sincell family, longstanding county residents and publishers of *The Republican*, who, he said, “were very comfortable” leading St. Mark’s congregation.

They may not have had some of the [religious] misgivings of those in the “underground church,” said Seaks, yet "St. Mark’s had been a very hospitable congregation for all kinds of people. Publisher Don Sincell and his wife, Suzie Sincell [a school principal], were happy to affirm what we were doing to reach out to members of the underground church.”

Bonnie Swyter arrived in Garrett County in 1976. She and her former husband joined the underground church.

“I was a Methodist and my husband was a Baptist,” said Swyter, who grew up in Washington Grove, Maryland. The town shared a similar history with Mountain Lake Park, once having been a venue for annual camps sponsored by the Foundry Methodist Church in Washington, D.C.

Swyter said her husband, the first math instructor at Garrett College, met Pastor Seaks and told him the couple were not regular churchgoers.

Seaks suggested the underground church. Gatherings there, she said, helped fill a social void. Swyter said she appreciated the “mix” of newcomers and veteran county residents. However, she said, “It was hard to find local people to do stuff with on the weekends” as the locals spent time with their extended families across the county. There were some exceptions.

Victoria Johnson was an Oakland native, daughter of an auto mechanic and niece of roads striker Elwood Savage. Married at 21, she and her husband moved to Red House, Maryland, close to the West Virginia border.

“I had fallen out of touch with my high school (Southern High School) friends,” said Johnson, who developed friendships with Swyter, T.R. Janes, and other newcomers in town. “The new folks in town liked to come over to our place in Red House,” she said.

The couple and their friends built American Indian-inspired sweat lodges in their yards where they gathered to sing and play music. After a few years, Johnson moved to California and stayed 32 years before returning to Garrett County.

Swyter was hired as the first elementary school counselor in Garrett County, serving for nearly 30 years. She helped to lead Big Brothers and Big Sisters in the county. But she and others were dissatisfied that proceeds from the group’s fundraising were sent outside the county before being made available to local efforts. So, she helped found Garrett Mentors, drawing together recent arrivals with longstanding county residents into a program serving school-age youth. The program was still thriving in 2025.

In 1986, Lynne Elmlinger was hired as a teacher at Loch Lynn Elementary School. Elected vice president of the Garrett County Federation of Teachers (AFT), Elmlinger fought to improve conditions for her fellow educators, including increased planning time and more reasonable workloads. She accompanied other county teachers to Annapolis and Washington, D.C. to advocate for investment in programs for children.

Fred Pratt, a native of Kitzmiller and nephew of roads striker and staunch Democrat Dominic Pratt, joined the teachers’ union and the fight to improve the county’s schools. Pratt graduated from Fairmont State University in West Virginia in 1973, alongside his wife Sonia. After graduation, they both began teaching at Southern High School, Fred in English and Sonia in art. The couple joined the book club with fellow teacher Sara Ramsey and her husband, Dave.

While Garrett County natives were often “wary about folks born outside the county,” Pratt said, “There was an air of cooperation” between the newcomers and veteran county residents. The coalescence, he said, wasn’t much different

from the experience of longtime residents who, he said, “for the most part worked together [back then] and didn’t really look at their political affiliations.”

Pratt moved into one of the homes built by Dick Morris, located on Herrington Manor Road near Herrington Manor State Park. He said: “I think folks from the outside helped the county in many ways. People here were isolated and disconnected to stuff nationally. Folks hadn’t traveled very far. The outsiders brought in new ideas.”

Pratt, a registered Democrat, said, “These people [outsiders] really complimented the area that was 80 to 90 percent conservative. They added more Democrats to the county.”

In 2020, Maurice Brookhart Jr., age 78, looked back and credited his fellow educators with improving the schools in Garrett County. Brookhart, whose father was a leader of the Garrett County Democratic Club, graduated from Southern High School in 1960 and won an engineering scholarship to Johns Hopkins University. He said he was “wholly unprepared” for Hopkins’ curriculum. He praised the mentorship of one of his Southern High mathematics teachers.

By contrast, he said, “I remember an English class at Southern where we spent six months reading J. Edgar Hoover’s *Masters of Deceit*.” Eventually, said Brookhart, “I caught up to my [Johns Hopkins] peers, many of whom came from private schools.”

He earned a PhD in chemistry and served on the National Academy of Sciences. Brookhart, a Democratic Party stalwart, was still teaching at the University of Houston in 2025.

For the county to prosper, the improvements in education, praised by Maurice Brookhart Jr. and others, now needed to be mirrored by a renewed planning effort to modernize the county’s infrastructure.

Planning

In June 1971, *The Cumberland News* reported Garrett County’s assessable tax base had increased by six million dollars. To provide further revenue, the new commissioners increased property taxes by $.43 for each $100 of assessed value, while providing $85,000 in discounts for elderly and disabled citizens.

Funding was now available to help improve sanitation. Edgar Harman, the Cove native who had returned to the county and was appointed the state health department’s county sanitarian in 1963, had never stopped advocating for modern sewage treatment. But controversies over planning prevented major

infrastructure improvements and threatened the ability to garner state and federal aid.

Hamilton appointed a new planning commission to accelerate the quest for federal and state funding for water treatment and other infrastructure improvements. And he embarked on what he deemed a "responsible" development policy. Planning Commission members included Merle Garletts (Friendsville), C.C. Bender (Grantsville), George Brady (Kitzmiller), Robert Glotfelty (Bittinger), Thomas R.H. Johnston (Deep Creek Lake) and Fred Thayer of Oakland.

Thayer, the Republican State's Attorney, and Bender, the Democratic Grantsville car dealer, had both been members of a planning commission established in 1962 by Republican commissioners Carl Schell (Oakland), Elra Garletts (Friendsville) and Fred Glotfelty (Oakland.)

Subdivision Ordinance Controversy

Hamilton's first proposal to his newly appointed planning commission was an ordinance regulating the building of subdivisions. He said the county needed to grow its tax base, not have it siphoned off by private developers for roads and sewage systems in privately owned developments primarily serving the tourism and second-home market. The proposed ordinance faced immediate, strong opposition.

Tim Dugan, who began working on the county's comprehensive plan in 1971, described Hamilton's pitch to the county in his chapter in an anthology, *Western Maryland: A Profile* (1980). The commissioners, wrote Dugan, "attempted to explain that [the ordinance's] twin purposes were consumer-protection [for the lot-purchasers) and taxpayer-protection (preventing the costs of roads and utilities being shifted from the developer onto County government)."

A cluster of developers, real estate agents and builders formed an "advisory" committee to fight the proposed ordinance. In a rare display of political activism, a group of Mennonites joined the opposition to the ordinance. They were concerned that the measure could make it too burdensome or costly to distribute plots of farmland within their families.

The advisory committee successfully lobbied Republican Del. DeCorsey Bolden to submit legislation that would have required a referendum to pass *any* subdivision ordinance in any of the state's counties.

Dugan wrote: “Gov. Mandel was easily convinced to veto the unsound legislation. But then the Commissioners, in a surprise conciliatory move, repealed the ordinance.”

The subdivision battle was W. Marshall Rickert’s introduction to Garrett County politics. Suddenly, Rickert, the Vietnam veteran, was thrust into a hot local conflict as the three Democratic commissioners assigned him to help organize community meetings on the subdivision ordinance.

Rickert said the “philosophical differences” between Hamilton, his progressive allies of the WWII generation, and residents like Ross Sines and Hubert Friend were still volatile even after Hamilton pulled the subdivision ordinance off the table.

Seeking to avoid the pitfalls, Rickert and Dugan reached out and opened discussions on planning with leaders of eight county municipalities. “I knew the roads strike had blown apart some of the poor leadership and isolation that was holding back change,” said Rickert, adding that a “vocal minority” in the county “believed developers could subdivide [land plots] and take no responsibility for building and maintaining roads."

Their stance wasn’t considered extreme by many, he said. “I grew up in a conservative area, but I never saw anything like this where, for instance, the mayor of Oakland refused to even consider planning for a sewage system.”

The subdivision battle also introduced Rickert to influential residents he would work with in coming decades. “Most of the successful entrepreneurs and developers, like Bob Rudy Sr., Clinton Englander, Tom Thayer and the Railey [real estate] family were allies in the subdivision ordinance campaign and advocates of zoning Deep Creek Lake,” said Rickert.

Rickert said the defeat of the subdivision ordinance was a “dose of needed perspective that had a good effect on me and also forced a reckoning in the county.” He said that he learned “Economic development and planning [in Garrett County] weren’t going to be linear processes.”

It took 26 years before the county enacted its first subdivision ordinance. John Nelson, who was appointed zoning administrator for Deep Creek Lake in 1977, said the impetus for the 1997 ordinance was state legislation, passed two years prior, calling for “smart” growth.

While coming to terms with his first big loss, Hamilton continued to tout his personal and political relationship with Mandel and the potential benefits it would bring to the county.

In May 1971, the commissioners allocated $134,000 to Garrett College. The Mandel administration had already upped its investment in the rural college by more than 50 percent per student, enabling the college to launch an adult education program. Three years later, Mandel appointed William Goldsborough, a leading local Democrat and member of the Garrett County Board of Education, to the state's board of education.

In July, the Democratic commissioners welcomed Mandel to Garrett County. The commissioners' minutes reveal much more preparation for Mandel's welcome than the itinerary their Republican predecessors planned in 1967 for a visit by one of their own, Gov. Spiro Agnew.

At Wisp's Village Inn, Mandel had breakfast with the mayors of the county's incorporated municipalities. Lunch was a barbeque at Brenneman's Woods Picnic Ground. Dinner, hosted by the commissioners, was held at the board chairman's Hamilton Farms. During the day, Mandel was escorted to the site of Garrett County Community College, then to a strip mine, a day care center in Jennings, the Harbison-Walker refractory, and a boat trip on Deep Creek Lake. Two months later, Mandel returned to Garrett County as marshal of the Autumn Glory parade.

Comprehensive Plan Developed

In September 1971, the county contracted with Urban Research and Development Corp. at a cost of $50,000 to develop a comprehensive plan for Garrett County. Some of the money would come from the federal Economic Development Administration, the same agency that had sent a representative to Oakland in 1967 to meet with leading residents and proposed designating the county as a "redevelopment area."

Urban Research, based in Bethlehem, Pa., assigned their newly hired planner Tim Dugan to spend two years developing the Garrett County comprehensive plan. Born in Allentown, Pa. in 1940, Dugan grew up in Catasauqua, a nearby borough. Dugan, whose father was a skilled design mechanic for an industrial equipment company, attended the University of Cincinnati. He then enlisted in the Air Force, where he taught drafting and map drawing at Fort Belvoir, Va.

After deciding on a career in planning, Dugan enrolled in the University of Washington in Seattle. He was one academic quarter shy of his master's degree in planning and running out of cash when he answered the call from Urban Research and Development. Dugan jumped at the opportunity to work in Garrett County. He ended up staying for more than a decade.

"I knew there had been some kind of record-breaking strike and the roads were the biggest part of the county government [budget]," said Dugan.

Dugan soon learned that the road strike had brought political change. Citizens angry about the roads not being repaired "hated" the commissioners' effort to destroy the functioning of county government.

Dugan praised the "very intelligent, progressive mentality" of planning commission members Merle Garletts, George Brady and Charlie Bender. "They wanted to figure out what the future would be, rather than having a laissez faire attitude."

Forward-Looking Planners

Merle Garletts, whose father Elra – known as Frank – served on the county commission from 1958 to 1962, owned a farm that straddled northern Garrett County's border with Pennsylvania. "He was a Garrett County native who knew that we needed to take a reasonable approach to development," said Tim Dugan.

George Brady, the Kitzmiller Democrat, and husband of Board of Education member Jackie Brady, said Dugan, was "the self-appointed spokesman for the low-income members of the community."

Dugan recalled Brady's broad, egalitarian view of planning. He fought for the right of county fishermen and hikers to access the "safety strip" of land surrounding Deep Creek Lake that was controlled by the lake's private utility company as a buffer to inadvertent flooding.

Charlie ['Bus'] Bender "was a good leader because he understood the philosophy and psychology of Garrett County," said Dugan.

Returning from WWII service on Guam, Bender attended the University of Maryland on the GI Bill. After graduation, he went to work in his father's automobile dealership, founded in 1931. He earned the nickname "Bus" selling school buses and contracting three of them to the county school district.

Emphasizing the political moderation of the times, C.C. Bender's son, Rick, compared his father to C. Clayton Edwards, owner of a competing Grantsville Dodge dealership, a Republican and the father of retired State Sen. George Edwards. "They were cut from the same piece of cloth," said Bender.

Robert Glotfelty, a dairy farmer, a close friend of Wayne Hamilton, was "very progressive," said his son, Rodney Glotfelty. The elder Glotfelty served as an Army medic in the Pacific theater during World War II and came back to be elected president of the farm bureau and a member of the soil conservation commission.

“People didn’t want to be told what to do with their property. They opposed a junkyard ordinance [limiting the accumulation of junk cars on private lots] and sewage [systems]. But my dad wanted comprehensive planning,” said Rodney Glotfelty. “He was even talking about running for county commissioner the night before he died.”

The planning commission’s work was bolstered by “William Nace, district conservationist of Maryland’s Soil Conservation Service. “Nace was a very interesting progressive,” said Marshall Rickert. Working with Col. J. Haig Jackson, the development corporation leader, Nace, then 63 years old, planned the impoundment that created Broadford Lake, building both a water source for Bausch and Lomb and a new fishing, boating, picnic venue for residents.

After two years of extensive preparation, hundreds of interviews and numerous public meetings, Dugan, Rickert and the planning commission presented the county’s comprehensive plan in two imposing glossy brochures, a 12 x 15-inch, 60-page proposal titled, *A Close Look at Garrett County*, and an 11 x 14-inch, 95-page brochure entitled, *A Development Plan for Garrett County*.

Dugan said most strategic plans were based upon a county’s electoral precincts. Instead, the planning commission’s report divided Garrett County into brilliantly colored watersheds, describing in detail the drainage basins of the county’s rivers and their unique features, including the quality of soils for farming, the demographics of their towns and their potential for development.

The plan deftly balanced political, economic, and cultural interests. For example, its authors endorsed existing efforts to lobby for more capital investment in school facilities and discussed the challenges inherent in serving the educational needs of a geographically spread-out population.

But planners knew first-hand the volatility of proposing any consolidation of the schools, going back to the controversies of the 1950s, when six county high schools were consolidated into two, Northern and Southern.

Kitzmiller parents kept their children home from school at the start of the 1950-1951 school year to protest plans to shut down Kitzmiller High School and send students to the planned Southern High School in Oakland. A reprise of that boycott could have jeopardized state funding of county schools.

Six parents leading the protest were indicted for conspiracy by a grand jury. After negotiations between the school board and the parents, the charges against Dr. Ralph Callendrella, Earl Shank, Charles McIntyre, Frank Damon, Carl Schell and Kenneth Bray were put on the stet (inactive) docket. Kitzmiller High School was shut down.

The Kitzmiller protest was followed in 1953 by the activism of road striker Asa Wilhelm and other Finzel-area farmers who won the right to send their children to nearby Allegany County High Schools.

Heeding the concerns of the county's parents, the planners warned: "Proposals to consolidate schools for the sake of educational efficiency must be very carefully weighed against the resulting loss of opportunities for small schools to serve broader community building goals."

The plan suggested that "smaller community schools" must have "access to the full range of educational resources that would be available in larger, consolidated schools."

At the release of the comprehensive plan, 50% of county families lived below the poverty level ($6,000 in yearly wages), compared to 18% statewide. The plan called for building more roads and infrastructure to encourage employers to set up shop in the county, citing the recent development of Broadford Dam to support the water needs of Bausch + Lomb.

The plan also endorsed more robust tourism services, including a second ski area on Keyser's Ridge. Balancing the call for more visitors with the county's desire for tranquility, the plan stated, "We do not wish to see Garrett County overrun by vacationers any more than the vacationers want to visit crowded places." The second ski area was never built.

The comprehensive plan endorsed the goals of the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act, citing the economic and health consequences of rivers fouled by acid drainage from mines and unregulated clear cutting of timber in the county's forests. Planners simultaneously endorsed the "safe" extraction of "hundreds of years of remaining deposits in [county] mines" to meet the "looming energy crisis [of the early 1970s]."

And they called for compensation of landowners and businesses that were prevented from mining on state land, financed by a severance tax on strip mines.

Planners adroitly challenged the Mandel administration's reluctance to permit the private harvesting of timber in state forests. The planners included the Mandel administration's reply in the section. The state claimed its policies promoting "responsible logging" were *renewing* forests for future timbering.

For the comprehensive plan to move into action – to overcome thorny conflicts or knee-jerk opposition – the planners proposed the establishment of sub-committees to build greater consensus on the plan's recommendations. An exception was made for the discussion of farm policy that was, they said, to be led not by the planners and politicians, but by Farm Bureau members.

Tim Dugan purchased a house on Alder Street in Oakland, remaining in the county after the plan was delivered. He split his time teaching at Garrett Community College and working in county planning until Garrett County promoted him to full-time chief of planning.

He resigned in 1984, moving to Towson, Maryland where he served as assistant director of development for Baltimore County until retiring in 2006. He kept a home in Garrett County until 2019.

Merit System Established

The last discussion of a merit system covering Garrett County's public jobs took place in 1968, when Commissioners Sines and Friend appointed vehemently anti-union former State Senator Clifford Friend to study the issue. The commissioners' minutes contained no further references to a merit system prior to the 1970 election.

In May 1971, Republican Del. DeCorsey Bolden, who had defeated Democratic Del. B.O. Aiken the prior year, introduced and passed a bill providing for a merit system to be established for Garrett County employees. The Hamilton commission unanimously approved the establishment of a merit system covering nearly all county employees.

Merit systems, introduced in the U.S. in the late 1800s, were obstensibly designed to ensure that job promotions would be based upon relative ability, skills, and knowledge, not on nepotism or personal relationships.

In April 1972, the Hamilton commission, showing deference to the union, appointed AFSCME Local 1835 President Leo Rinker to sit on the Merit Board alongside Earl D. Foster, a roads department worker, and Robert Diehl, a Grantsville Ford dealer.

Rinker advocated for increased pay for his members through the merit system. AFSCME was also seeking to spread its influence in Garrett County.

Disappointed at their failure to codify collective bargaining, Garrett County's roads' workers were also upset that the strict guidelines of the county's merit system offered less advancement to county roads workers than expected.

Andy Lewis, hired by the county roads in 1972, was elected vice president of Local 1834 and assigned as the union's representative to the merit board, succeeding former Local President Leo Rinker.

"The other members of the merit board, Bob Stemple and Bob Diehl, wanted to keep pay scales down," said Lewis, son of roads department striker Henry Lewis.

"The [roads department] pay scale [under the merit system] was terrible," said Lewis. "A lot of merit board meetings were held. A lot of words were exchanged. I even got called names by my own [union] people who were afraid they would lose pay if roads workers were pulled out of the merit system."

Added Lewis, "I told them the union's contracts was where our bread and butter were coming from."

After five years of work on the roads, Lewis, seeking a boost in pay and benefits, went to work at Island Creek Coal Company's North Branch Mine in nearby Bayard, West Virginia, joining the United Mine Workers of America.

"Some time after I left the roads department," said Lewis, the roads workers were pulled out of the merit system."

Collective Bargaining Push

Winning a collective bargaining ordinance in Garrett County would put teeth in AFSCME's ability to win improved contracts, marking the final step away from the parochial negotiating model set by the Garrett Roads Employees' Association back in 1956. Maryland had no statewide statute mandating collective bargaining rights for public workers, a situation persisting into 2025.

Blanket recognition of collective bargaining in Garrett County could only be achieved by state sanction. Unions and their members needed to convince Western Maryland's delegation in the state legislature to take countywide collective bargaining to the floor in Annapolis.

With the increased clout of state sanction, it might be easier for AFSCME to organize other county employees, like those in the sewer and water departments.

AFSCME began the push for countywide collective bargaining by asking the commissioners to sign their first agreement with the union. All prior agreements with the Association had been settled with a handshake but no signature. Wayne Hamilton had asked for AFSCME's international officers to sign the county's latest agreement with Local 1834. But Hamilton hadn't put his own signature on the document.

Commissioners: "No Legal Right to A Union Agreement"

The February 20, 1973, commission minutes noted the board had received “several phone calls” from newly appointed AFSCME Staff Rep. Ray Metz. In his phone calls, Metz asked the commissioners to sign the 1971 contract and to support the introduction of a collective bargaining bill in Annapolis covering Garrett County.

Two days after the call, the board sent Metz a letter stating: “It is the present consensus of all local [commission] members… they would be willing to support statewide legislation allowing County Commissioners to sign an employment agreement.”

“Both the commissioners and your appropriate representatives would review and approve the language of any bill of this nature before it was submitted. If you have prepared such a bill … we would be willing to review it … and pass along our comments.”

On Feb. 26, 1973, Metz and Local 1834 President Rinker appeared before the commission and distributed copies of a draft collective bargaining bill. Hamilton refused to endorse the bill. Rinker told Hamilton the men were “very unhappy with the commissioners,” saying "They feel that they are getting the runaround on this matter.”

Backtracking on his commitment to consider the issue, Hamilton argued that collective bargaining mandates were unnecessary, telling Rinker and Metz, "There is more public acceptance, and we have better relations with our employees [than did the last commission].

"Mr. DeWitt [roads superintendent] has good working relationships with the men in the roads department and there is not the criticism or sarcasm [that existed under the prior commission]. The whole thing [collective bargaining ordinance] is very unnecessary since we have every legal document as if the contract was signed."

Metz told Hamilton that roads workers wanted a signed contract for “security purposes.” He said he would return to the men with the results of the meeting and “see what could be arranged.”

The commission minutes concluded: “After reviewing all information concerning the legality of signing an agreement with AFSCME, it was decided and agreed by all present [commissioners and the county’s lawyer] that the commissioners do not have the legal right to an agreement with any labor union.”

The commissioners were concerned that union leaders – now charging them with bargaining in bad faith – would erode their support from the roads crews.

They posted a letter in the county garages “to show our confirmation of this agreement and our good faith.”

The letter told employees the pact with AFSCME [unsigned by the commissioners] was “the recognized instrument which we will work by for the term of the agreement.”

AFSCME leaders continued to strive for collective bargaining contracts, not non-binding “agreements.”

In 2019, Ray Metz looked back on his dealings with Hamilton and the commissioners. The commissioners, he said, ended up quietly signing the 1971 agreement despite their public stance. He recalled Hamilton saying at the time of the signing, “If we’d been dealing with some of those hoodlums in Baltimore [AFSCME reps.], instead of you, we wouldn’t be signing this agreement.”

We had de facto bargaining in Garrett County, said Metz. But the commissioners, he added, didn’t want to “see it in concrete in the law.”

Metz said that Ernie Crofoot and other statewide AFSCME union leaders knew that [without a law], if administrations changed, the new commissioners could back out of agreements. “Even when you had a collective bargaining law, some people wouldn’t follow it,” said Metz.

Had the commissioners strengthened the form of county government, AFSCME might have been better able to marshal its leverage to provide the union a firmer footing in the county. Shortly after their election, Hamilton, Opel and Guy discussed whether to push for a new form of governance (“charter” or “code home rule”) that would vest more authority in the commission.

The board, however, continued to operate with minimal autonomy, and no further discussion on “charter” or “code home rule” appeared in the minutes during the commissioners’ 1970-1974 term.

The quarrels between Garrett County’s commissioners and the union over collective bargaining and labor contracts were overshadowed by a persistent debate over the place of its lake and rivers in the local tourist-based economy.

Would the profits of the tourism industry, rising in the wake of improved roads, benefit all county residents? Or would the divide—exposed during the roads strike—between the wealthier businesses and bankers and the region’s working families, only widen?

Deep Creek Lake

When Gov. Spiro Agnew visited Garrett County on Sept. 26, 1967, he urged commissioners and other county leaders to develop a comprehensive plan and limit septic system sewage seeping into Deep Creek Lake. Agnew, a former member of Baltimore County's Zoning Board of Appeals, might have expected his offer of state money to build a sewer system around the lake to quickly lead to progress.

But it would take 14 years for a public sewage system surrounding the lake to be completed. One month after Agnew's visit, county commissioners discussed the problem of septic fields from individual homes and cabins contaminating Deep Creek Lake.

"You had property owners [at the lake] who understood the necessity of good environmental practices," said Edgar Harman, citing Aza Stanton, a celebrated local artist who served as president of the influential Deep Creek Lake Property Owners Association.

The sewer system would eliminate the requirement that building lots along the lake have at least one acre of land to accommodate their septic systems.

"Other property owners feared it [the sewer system] would result in explosive growth [as lot sizes could be reduced]," said Harman. "You had a group who saw the value of zoning in the Deep Creek Lake area. But you also had folks in other parts [of the county] that weren't interested in that."

The Hamilton commission and its planners had backed away from any proposal for countywide zoning. But they pushed forward at both the county and state level for a more comprehensive approach to the development of the lake's watershed. And they sought greater influence over the decisions of the lake's owner, Pennsylvania Electric Co.

On May 10, 1971, Deep Creek Lake homeowner Thomas R. H. Johnston, who chaired the planning commission with State's Attorney Fred Thayer, presented an ordinance creating a planning and zoning district to be known as Deep Creek District "for a period not to exceed thirty-six months from the date of its adoption."

One month later, a public hearing on the ordinance was held at the McHenry fire hall, with a second hearing on June 17 at the First National Bank's community room in Oakland. The ordinance was adopted four days later.

Some of the newly hired experts from outside the county would help to develop basic sewage infrastructure surrounding the lake. But it took fresh local talent to break the inertia and initiate the project.

Edgar Harman moved up to serve as the county's chief environmental officer. He then hired a childhood friend, Wendell Beitzel, to replace him as a sanitarian at the Board of Health. Beitzel had worked as a microbiologist at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md. and served in the U.S. Army in Germany during the Vietnam War.

A year after Beitzel's hiring, the federal Clean Water Act of 1972 set wastewater standards and provided federal construction grants for sewage treatment plants.

"The Clean Water Act was the impetus for towns [like McHenry in the Deep Creek District] that couldn't afford sewer systems to provide serious treatment of wastes," said Beitzel. Working together with Marshall Rickert and others, Harman and Beitzel initiated the protracted effort—detoured by years of litigation—for developing a sewage system surrounding Deep Creek Lake.

The Garrett County League of Women Voters, led by Dottie Leighton, supported the effort. She was aided by Meg Stevens, the former *Montgomery County Sentinel* reporter, the league's director of environmental quality.

Beitzel's advocacy was strengthened by his growing influence in the business community. The same year he began work at the Board of Health, Beitzel and his wife Ruth, whom he'd met during his Army service in Germany, purchased the Point View Inn on Deep Creek Lake.

Beitzel soon was elected to leadership of the Garrett County-Deep Creek Lake Promotional Council and the Deep Creek Lake Business Association. Both groups proposed a feasibility study of sewage disposal alternatives. Beitzel recalled a public hearing on the study in McHenry.

"Businesspeople and local residents said we needed to do things to protect water quality," said Beitzel, who later served as both a county commissioner and a Maryland State Delegate. Beitzel visited sewage treatment plants in other locales and wrote grants to help the county meet its $680,000 obligation of a $21 million pressure sewage system, powered by a series of pumping stations. The county advertised for bids and signed contracts with 10 firms to begin work on the new system.

Shortly after awarding the contracts, the property owners' association, representing mostly second-home owners, non-voters in the county, sued to stop the project. The association contended the county had not properly established the sanitary district. And the group differed with the sanitary commission on the type of sewage system that would be installed.

The courts granted the property owners' association a temporary injunction, delaying the system's construction. To challenge the injunction, the board of commissioners hired Warren Rich, a former assistant Maryland attorney general. The court mandated the county hold public hearings to reestablish the sanitary district.

Despite their disagreements over the new system, most of the "lake people," said Beitzel, seemed to agree that leaking septic systems in homes along the lake threatened the health and vitality of the water.

The rising property values surrounding the lake were decisive in funding improvements in other parts of the county. James Lininger Jr., son of a roads striker and a local excavator, worked for decades as a volunteer firefighter in Friendsville. Volunteer departments were financed by a contribution of $.05 for every $100 of assessed real property value.

"In the 60s, [the Friendsville department] got about $6,000. Today, it's $100,000," said Lininger, who, in 2021, simultaneously contended that the lake district is far too favored in infrastructure maintenance and repairs.

1974 Commissioner Election

In July 1974, intent upon reinforcing his relationship with Mandel, Hamilton invited leading Democrats to a commission meeting to discuss the governor's request to convene a "youth committee" for Mandel's re-election campaign. The Nixon administration's Watergate scandal had damaged the Republican Party's image. Hamilton and the Democrats hoped the opposing party's troubles could help them retain their offices in the upcoming elections.

Meg Stevens joined the Democratic Party's delegation at the commission meeting, along with Joan Sewell, Joe Munane, Meg Stevens, Anna Mae Welch, Michael Naylor, Jim Matthews, Beatrice Opel, Tom Dabney, Bill Goldsborough and Harry Seggie, the trade unionist and Accident, Md. tavern owner who had supported the roads strikers.

Michael Naylor personified the quandary facing "liberal" Democrats in Garrett County. After graduating from the University of Washington at Seattle in 1971, Naylor returned to Oakland to work in the family hardware and sundry business. Naylor had been active in the anti-Vietnam War movement on campus. He decided to volunteer for Sen. George McGovern's presidential campaign.

Naylor rented a storefront to serve as the campaign office from his cousin, Homer Bennett, chairman of Garrett County's Republican Central Committee, who

had warned of “anarchy” if Democrats took over the Garrett County commission. Bennett managed Rolyan’s, the store started in 1958 by Howard Naylor, Michael Naylor’s father.

Naylor said, “My immediate circle of friends was supportive [of the McGovern campaign]. But the ‘old’ guard Democrats could not stomach McGovern and I was not aware of any sympathetic Republicans. The town’s folk tolerated us liberals and probably smiled at us quixotic types.”

He added that, "Republicans and Democrats generally got along. I would say that we did have fun together and things were not polarized like they are now.” His uncle, Art Naylor, was also a Democrat in the mostly Republican family.

Naylor left the county four years after his return. Looking back, he said, “The rural setting leads to a desire to keep government out of our life and the lack of Black, Asian and Hispanic influence leaves residents more fearful of politics emanating from the cities.”

The “old guard” Democrats Hamilton, Guy and Opel were all unopposed in the 1974 primary election for commissioner.

Republican George Edwards, a town councilman in Grantsville, challenged Opel in the general election.

Edwards was the grandson of the car dealer and board of education member (name the person) who, in 1968, sued the county commission—alongside two Democrats—to fund Garrett Community College.

A star athlete, Edwards had graduated from West Virginia's Fairmont College in 1970 and earned a teaching certificate the following year at Frostburg State. He was drafted by the Baltimore Colts in the NFL but never played.

Edwards waged a populist campaign, promising better communications, listing his home phone number on his ads, vowing to address unemployment, and pledging to visit workers at their workplaces.

Oakland real estate agent and attorney Tom Doyle challenged Hamilton, and Kitzmiller resident Don Bender faced Bernard Guy.

Hamilton-Doyle was the marquee race for commissioner, with both candidates publishing several large ads in *The Republican*. Hamilton had appointed Doyle to an advisory committee to consider the subdivision ordinance. Doyle became a leader of the opposition to the measure and made the losing ordinance a centerpiece of his campaign.

Doyle grew up on a farm in Randallstown in Baltimore County. He served in the Korean War and later moved to Garrett County as a claim’s adjuster for Kemper Insurance Co. After earning a law degree in 1966, Doyle taught real estate

law at Garrett Community College to many of the up-and-coming entrepreneurs, including Jim and Sis Railey, who founded Railey Realty.

"Property Owners Rip-Off," screamed one of Doyle's ads, attacking the subdivision measure: "Tom Doyle will be fair. He won't ignore your rights. He won't allow further violations such as the subdivision ordinance of 1971 by Wayne Hamilton."

One of Doyle's ads listed endorsements from farmers and from "Democrats for Doyle."

The conservative campus group Young Americans for Freedom (YAF) signed another of Doyle's ads. Garrett County resident Elwood Groves was the Maryland state chairman for YAF. Groves, who was later elected to the county's board of commissioners, had worked on Alabama Gov. George Wallace's failed 1972 campaign for president.

Doyle called for commission meetings to be rescheduled from late afternoons to evenings to increase attendance. He argued that businesses, not taxpayers, should pay for the building of a county convention hall, then being considered by political and economic leaders. He excoriated Hamilton for levying high taxes, pointing to other counties where taxes had been lowered in the recent past. He also called for changing from a gubernatorial-appointed school board to one elected by county residents.

Hamilton and his ticket parried Doyle's charge on taxes, saying taxes had held steady. He touted his relationships with Mandel that had brought more than $6 million dollars of investment into the county in 1974 alone, including school construction and sewage treatment projects.

"Because of Mr. Hamilton's interest in the county," one ad said, "he has made several state level contacts, which if lost, would cost the county much-needed money and much-deserved respect."

Hamilton alleged that Doyle's service on the commission would be self-serving. As a real estate entrepreneur, he said, Doyle would be deciding upon zoning and other issues that directly affected his business.

The only full-page ad of the election season was purchased by Democrats' supporting Mandel, reminding voters the governor had visited Garrett County more than any of his predecessors. The ad recapped Mandel's appointment of county resident, William Goldsborough, to the state's board of education.

Republicans Bender and Edwards decisively defeated Guy and Opel. Hamilton squeezed out a victory over Doyle, 3,188 votes to 2,912, but Democratic dominance on the commission was over.

1974-1978 Commission Term

Contention and deliberation over the future of Deep Creek Lake and the Youghiogheny River continued to occupy the commissioners' attention during the 1974-1978 term.

On September 1, 1977, *The Republican* reported that acting Maryland Gov. Blair Lee III, head of the Maryland Board of Public Works, visited the county. Lee had assumed the governorship three months prior, after Marvin Mandel's conviction for mail fraud and racketeering.

During Lee's visit, Wayne Hamilton lobbied for increasing the county's share of coal severance surcharges and discussed with the board plans to expand public recreation areas on Deep Creek Lake.

As a non-federal hydropower project, Penelec fell within the jurisdiction and regulatory approval process of the Federal Energy Commission (later the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). Each hydropower project was required to submit "exhibits" outlining how they met federal standards. The requirements included "Exhibit R," covering recreation use and public access.

During the previous seven years, increasing public access to the lake had been the subject of discussions between Maryland's DNR, the county's commissioners, Pennsylvania Electric Company and associations of lake property owners, businesses, and civic groups.

The commissioners endorsed a plan to develop two new public access points on the lake, pending approval of the Federal Power Commission. The public access areas would complement Deep Creek Lake State Park. A 15-acre parcel on the northern shore of the lake would feature a swimming area, bath house, sports fields, and picnic areas. A second four-acre spot at Green Glade near the eastern tip of the lake would provide entry to owners of hand-carried boats.

Penelac agreed to give the state land it owned and offered $450,000 to help the parties purchase more to construct recreation areas. Total costs of the two areas would be about $1.2 million, with the state contributing $750,000.

Despite years of deliberation, the plan to develop a new public park near the dam was shelved, along with creating a boat launch area at the lake's east end.

Paul Durham, who managed the lake for Maryland's Department of Natural Resources from 1989 to 2004, said both sites were "woefully limited" in terms of location and site characteristics. Said Durham, "One of the citizen committee members actually admitted to me there was not much interest in finding good

locations as that was perceived as being detrimental to nearby lakefront property owners."

In the 1990s, the parties agreed to expand the Deep Creek Lake State Park's boat launch facility and create a small fishing area adjacent to the Route 219 bridge to satisfy Penelac's federal licensing requirement.

In 2015, the Maryland Board of Public Works appropriated $1 million for the DNR to purchase a one-acre public access area off Yacht Club Road in the Turkey Neck section of the lake.

Five hundred residents signed a petition opposing the plan, and county commissioners joined the opposition. The *Cumberland Times-News* – reporting on the DNR cancellation – wrote, "restrictive covenants were discovered … which would make it unfeasible to pursue the planned purchase."

Public access continues to generate controversy. In a 2021 Facebook post, Don Hershfeld, the former owner of a bed and breakfast located near the lake displayed the ambivalence over public access.

Hershfeld supported the development of more access to make it easier for him to bring his kayak to the lake. He said he understood the opposition of lakefront owners to bring in more visitors who "lack respect … [for the lake]."

Simultaneously, he excoriated some of the same property owners for buying more powerful boats and jet skis that are eroding Deep Creek's shoreline.

On Feb. 9, 1978, *The Republican* reported that planning director Tim Dugan and Commissioner Wayne Hamilton were in support of the Maryland DNR taking over management of Deep Creek Lake from Pennsylvania Electric. The Maryland legislature passed HB 647, empowering DNR to assume the lake's management. Republican Del. DeCoursey Bolden opposed the bill, contending that it gave "too much unregulated authority to DNR."

Hamilton challenged Bolden's opposition, telling residents. "All the public meetings conducted in the preparation of this bill were well attended and well participated in by the property owners. The bill insists that any money generated at Deep Creek Lake will be returned to Deep Creek Lake for the benefit of Garrett County citizens."

DNR took over the lake. The relationship between local policy makers and the state would sometimes be contentious. Edgar Harman, who often worked to help municipalities qualify for state wastewater treatment grants, recalled one incident that took place before the state's acquisition of the lake.

Maryland had been issuing discharge permits into Deep Creek Lake for waste that had been treated with nitrogen and phosphorus. The state then released

ammonia into the lake to control the acidity of the effluent. But, said Harman, objecting to the state's protocol, this treatment “only raised the lake’s nitrogen level even higher.” Joining with Penelec, the lake’s owner, he convinced the state to abandon the practice.

Harman, Beitzel and the commissioners established a new sanitary commission, as ordered by the court. They then recommenced construction of the pressure sewage system in the lake zone as a new conflict developed over effluents.

Trout Unlimited, an advocacy group of fishermen, threatened a suit to stop the construction of the sewage treatment plant. The group contended that chlorinated effluent flowing from the proposed treatment plant to be built on Mayhew Inn Road directly across from the lake’s dam would be lethal to trout in the Yough, a favorite venue for fly fishermen.

Trout Unlimited dropped its suit after successfully negotiating for a study and an effluent monitoring system. The monitoring system raised the costs of the project, drawing the ire of lakefront business owners like Celeste Lascaris, operator of Silver Tree Inn, formerly Nemacolin Lodge.

Lascaris told the *Washington Post*, “We don’t need anybody [Trout Unlimited] to come up here and tell us how to run our county. We have people up here who watch out for everything in the environment, and they would do nothing to hurt the lake.”

Marshall Rickert, the new county administrator, was once again called upon to soften a conflict. He told the *Post,* “This is not a battle pitting good guys against bad guys … Not the forces of crass commercialism against lovers of the environment.”

The [Hamilton administration], said Rickert, “wants to guarantee that Deep Creek Lake is not polluted, and we do not believe that the treatment plant discharge will harm the fish in the Youghiogheny.”

After numerous delays, the lake’s sewage system was finally completed in 1983.

The system, said Beitzel, was just one element in advancing the tourism, services, and real estate businesses in the lake area.

“We couldn’t prohibit mobile homes around the lake,” said Beitzel. “But businesspeople were concerned the lake could start looking junky.” An ordinance was passed enabling “special objections” by homeowners to mobile homes in adjacent properties. “Land values were protected,” said Beitzel. “That was instrumental in what you see [the high quality of homes] around the lake today.”

The increased property values and property taxes around the lake resulted in the continuing departure of many working folks who still owned cabins on the water.

Rickert left the county in 1979 and, in 1985, was appointed director of the Maryland Department of Vehicles, managing a workforce of 2,000. “I’ve spent years reflecting back about what I learned in Garrett County. I didn’t want to leave. It was heartbreaking,” he said. “I learned more in my 10 years there than in any other period of my life.”

“Scenic and Wild River”

In 1976, the state’s Department of Natural Resources declared a 21-mile section of the Yough as a “Scenic and Wild River.” The program was designed to protect land bordering the river from development, leaving a view from the water of undeveloped forests, mountains, and valleys. The state program was modeled on the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968.

The scenic and wild river program exacerbated a conflict between outsiders and some county residents that had begun in the mid 1960s. A growing number of kayakers, rafters and whitewater canoeists had been arriving in Friendsville to navigate the Yough’s challenging rapids, including a stretch that cascaded downward for three miles at 115 feet per mile. Since most of the land bordering the river was privately owned, kayakers and fishermen were considered by many to be trespassers, despite the local commerce they generated.

The scenic and wild river program barred the taking of trees in large swaths of the river’s borderlands. Many loggers saw the kayakers and the program’s sponsors as invading forces threatening their livelihoods.

Keith Roberts, one of the north county’s newly arrived residents, was soon thrust into the middle of the controversy between the kayakers and the loggers. Roberts was raised outside of Cleveland. His mother, Doris Glass Roberts, grew up in the Cove, where her father, Henry Glass, owned a farm. Keith spent his summers in Garrett County working on the farm.

In 1974, Roberts was attending Cornell University, majoring in natural resources management, when his grandmother offered him and his two siblings one-acre plots on the family farm. Roberts traveled to the county to pick his plot. Although he said he had enjoyed living in upstate New York, Roberts ended up staying. He settled in the Cove and met other newcomers to the county.

“They were people moving here just to get out of the cities,” he said.

Roberts went to work for the Maryland DNR, conducting forest inventories. Soon after, he was assigned responsibility for helping implement the scenic and wild river program.

"I was in the camp that thought recreational tourism was a good, sustainable industry," he said. The river program was a "classic battle between private property rights and public taking [eminent domain]."

But, said Roberts, the way the state started the program was "pretty botched and clumsy." Maryland state regulators, said Roberts, didn't appreciate the long history of logging that made trees an important source of income, not simply natural adornments.

"The state used a computer program to determine how far to restrict development [based on what could be seen from the river], but it [restricted timbering or development] on 30 percent of the land you couldn't really see anyway.'

The mistakes helped fuel resentment toward "experts" in Annapolis, said Roberts.

On March 11, 1976, 200 residents, mostly from the northern part of the county, showed up at a hearing to oppose the computer-drawn lines restricting timbering. *The Republican* reported that Homer Mellott, the bearded preacher who held the Bible next to Ross Sines during the battle of the bus, addressed state regulators.

Mellot, wrote *The Republican*, "likened the [wild and scenic designation] to a communist blueprint for the country which dictated no private ownership of land."

Former State Senator Clifford Friend, who had denounced the roads strikers in numerous letters to the editor of *The Republican*, told attendees the scenic and wild river program was "The most brazen attempt the state has ever seen to take over control of private land."

Friend's vehemence had alienated some of his neighbors. "Clifford Friend was a hot-tempered and mouthy character," said Frank Vitez, the son of roads striker James Vitez and former CEO of Phenix Technologies, based in Accident. "I thought he was dead, and he was still writing letters to the editor."

The Yough Property Owners Association, led by Marine Col. Richard C. Browning, Ms. Douglas Shank and Ms. Jean Frantz, called for the state to compensate landholders who owned river-adjoining property that was now declared part of the scenic and wild river program. Planning Director Tim Dugan supported the demand.

In March 1976, Garrett County's commissioners unanimously voted to recommend the state end the scenic and wild river program. That same month, the federal Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (BOR) expressed an interest in the Yough becoming part of the *national* scenic and wild river program. The federal agency joined the call for property owners to be compensated for lands acquired. BOR scheduled its own hearing at Northern High School.

In September, *The Republican* reported that ninety landowners along the scenic and wild river route had closed off access to the river. Some fishermen were "finding their tires slashed when they got back to their vehicles."

Steny Hoyer (D-P.G. County), then president of the State Senate (and future U.S. House of Representatives majority leader), visited the county. Hoyer told the newspaper, "Some changes needed to be made in the scenic and wild river program." In October 1976, Del. DeCorsey Bolden introduced a bill to repeal the DNR's authority to implement phase two of the river program. The bill failed.

Eugene Meyer, in his book *Maryland Lost and Found*, wrote: "As [Garrett County] native[s] saw it, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, the largest landowner in the county, accorded them no respect." Their favorite target, said Meyer, was DNR Secretary James B. Coulter. "Some incidents were reported of property owners shooting at kayakers who exited the river onto their land," wrote Meyer.

Keith Roberts, looking back on the conflict, said, "There was something wrong when kayakers had to make 'commando raids' onto private property to put their boats in the water."

Jesse Whittemore was one of the kayakers facing the bullets of Friendsville resident Rusty Thomas, who, in August 1970, had been on the town parking lot in Oakland defending John Ross Sines' attempt to break the roads workers' strike. A native of Ellicott City, Maryland, Whittemore began kayaking on the lower Yough with Howard County Police Explorer Post No. 1952 about 1975.

"I spent a decade-and-a-half as a kayak bum, a kayak maniac," said Whittemore, who moved to Friendsville in 1980. "I understood there were hard feelings when the river was designated 'scenic and wild' because people were timbering and strip mining.

"I had kayaked on the Cheat River in Albright, WV in Preston County, WV, where the water was orange [due to run-off from the region's coal mining]."

Rob Smith, a former Garrett County building inspector, said he suspected that some of the locals' resentments of state and federal regulation of the Yough went back to the federal mandates that brought water and treatment to Friendsville.

Prior to the 1972 Clean Water Act, he said, “Friendsville had mountain springs and gravity-fed town water.”

Smith said the federal government “wanted to take water out of the Yough and purify it.” He said that was a “one-size-fits-all approach to water treatment.”

A New York-based contractor arrived to build a new water system. Despite hopes for local jobs, the firm mostly employed workers from outside the state. “The New York group did pretty crummy work,” said Smith. One winter, the water system’s pipes froze. The job was “typical of the federal government’s shoddy supervision.”

Hugh Friend, a retired teacher, farmer, and historian from Friendsville, illustrated the depth of the divide between the boosters of tourism and the county’s farmers and workers. “All of the [development] focus is around Deep Creek Lake,” said Friend, whose cattle farm was located close to Maryland’s borders with Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

He argued that Friendsville’s economic development was undermined by over-regulation of land adjacent to the Youghiogheny River, due to the scenic and wild designation. Rules governing the Youghiogheny Reservoir (straddling the Pennsylvania-Maryland border) were unreasonable as well, said Friend, adding that overly stringent regulations on the flood plain for the Deep Creek Lake made Friendsville an economic “dead” spot in the county.

Keith Roberts said some of the local citizens’ concerns about “outside” experts went far beyond wariness of regulations and newcomers. “It’s true there was an elitist attitude by some college-educated people [coming into the county]. But, at the same time, I would have to fault some of the locals for not having respect for book learning.”

“I knew agronomy and soils and how to inventory the forest [from college studies]. But some of my own relatives thought I was just ‘playing in the woods,’ said Roberts, a musician who teamed up with Rob Smith, forming the local band, “Smith and Roberts,” still making music in 2025. Their song *Garrett County Time* became the county’s theme song, played at festivals, county fairs and in bars from Oakland to Friendsville.

“My relatives gave me more attention for the notoriety I got playing music than for my work on the forests,” said Roberts. He felt that contempt for book learning had contributed to the county losing out on federal and state support because of lack of expertise in grant writing and public policy.

In June 1977, DNR, seeking to assuage some of the opposition to the scenic and wild river program, announced a reduction of the Yough's protected corridor by 3,000 acres, leaving the land in private hands.

"It's been painstakingly slow," said Roberts in 2021. "But I think residents in Friendsville [and the northern county] are finally embracing change and welcoming recreational tourism."

Despite his support for the river program, Roberts left DNR. "I tried three times, but I wasn't able to work for the government and deal with the bureaucracy," he said, echoing band mate Rob Smith's negative assessment of the state's "one size fits all" approach to problems.

Roberts' and Smith's distrust of the bureaucracy fit more naturally with the view of residents in the northern part of the county than folks in the mercantile and government center to the south. But residents on both ends of the county were conflicted in their opinion of "outsiders.

Northern County in Transition

The county's north-south divide goes back to the county's founding in 1872.

In 1986**,** Eugene L. Meyer wrote, "The north and the south competed for a new county seat. The selection by fifty-three votes of Oakland in the south over Grantsville up north triggered demands that the new county be split in two. The hard feelings have survived into modern times."

Stephen Schlosnagle, author of "*Garrett County—A History of Maryland's Tableland,*" was born in Accident in 1953. He was one of about 20 students out of 100 who went to college from the 1972 senior class at Northern High School. After graduating from the University of Maryland, he moved to San Francisco and worked for a steamship company for 12 years, then returned to the Southeast.

"I don't recall any real contact with the world outside of Garrett County growing up [in northern Garrett County]," said Schlosnagle. "But there was always a north-south divide in the county."

"A lot of southern county people thought they were better than we were," said Linda Burch, who grew up in Accident on a 135-acre cattle farm. "My family was dirt poor."

Burch graduated from Northern High School in Accident in 1964 and followed her older sister to Adelphi, Maryland, where she got a job as secretary at the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Hyattsville. After living in the D.C. area for seven years and getting married, she returned to Garrett County in 1971.

Three years later, she was divorced. Forced to sell the red brick rambler she and her husband owned adjacent to Garrett Community College, she ended up living in a trailer she purchased for $9,000 on one acre of her parents' farm.

"Women [in the northern county] had to be tough," said Burch. "No matter how many daughters a farmer had, the farm was almost always left to the oldest son."

She recalled only three women in her area that inherited an equal share of their parents' farm with their brothers. "Most post-war babies [girls and boys] didn't have the opportunity to go to college. None of my cousins on either side graduated from college."

Burch, who for a time worked as a local waitress making $1.35 an hour, added, "Deep Creek Lake is the nucleus [of the local economy], but the jobs don't pay."

With its tourism sector, Garrett County was "not like a lot of other Appalachian areas," said Stephen Schlosnagle, whose interest in local history was nurtured by his fourth-grade teacher, Mary Strauss, author of "*Flowery Vale*," a history of Accident.

Schlosnagle said, The county's economy benefited during the boom period [of tourism] in Mountain Lake Park and Deer Park, but a few people benefited more than others, which helped fuel a love-hate thing with outsiders."

Frank Vitez, the son of roads striker James Vitez, grew up on a farm on Mill Run in Friendsville.

"People want to come to Garrett County and like the beautiful landscape and the next thing they do is complain about the farmer next door spreading manure on his farm, roosters crowing in the morning or the [natural gas] compressor pumps that have been here for 50 years," said Vitez.

"They want to get in positions of leadership to get Garrett County more like the places they came from. Why don't they just go back to where they came from?" asked Vitez, who did allow that "some" newcomers adapt well to their new environment and neighbors.

The new arrivals in the northern county during the 1970s were in many ways as different from their fellow newcomers to the south as were the northern county's longstanding farmers from the established business interests around Oakland and Deep Creek Lake.

The kayakers who started arriving in the 1960s were mostly part-time residents. But the lure of one of the favorite whitewater rivers in the eastern U.S.

and a burgeoning kayak industry led some to move permanently in the 70s and early 80s. Some became entrepreneurs.

"This was a booming period for river outfitters," said Jesse Whittemore, who moved permanently to Friendsville in 1980. "Friendsville and the Yough were at the heart of a "whitewater renaissance," he said. "Friendsville's paddle builders were known to be the best in the world."

Whittemore became recognized for launching a new breed of kayakers called "playboaters." Mounting kayaks with less volume in the bow and stern, they were able to more easily dip either end of the boats under water.

A skilled designer, Whittemore rented space and began constructing kayaks in Friendsville's old Crawford Hotel building. His 12-foot "squirt" boats, sitting low in the water, were widely celebrated by kayakers. But some residents filed a cease-and-desist order to prevent Whittemore from building kayaks in the old hotel, shutting down his shop for violating the town's zoning. Later, they rescinded the town's zoning, but Whittemore didn't want to take chances on another business disruption.

An even more iconoclastic group of transplants was simultaneously arriving in the northern county. In 1972 Bill Moors, parson of the Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist church in Bethesda, Maryland and his wife, Marilyn Moors, a professor of anthropology at Montgomery County Community College, purchased 80 acres on Buffalo Run in Friendsville. The Moors invited their fellow parishioners from the D.C. suburbs to camp on their property during summer vacations and they sold parcels of the land to other part-time and full-time newcomers.

Bill Moors died in 1976. Marilyn Moors moved permanently to Friendsville around 1980. She taught at Frostburg University and became more active in county affairs, working to bridge some of the divide between north and south. A member and, later, leader of the Garrett County chapter of the American Association of University Women, Moors launched a quilting club to raise money for the Friendsville Library. She also led efforts to establish a used bookstore, End of the Line Books, located in a trailer adjacent to the B&O Railroad Station in Oakland. Both the bookshop and the quilting club were still operating in 2025.

Kathleen Moors, Marilyn's granddaughter, spent her childhood summers at the farm. "There was a lot of anger and hatred between some of the newcomers and locals. But my grandmother didn't just move up here and isolate herself," said Moors, a stationary engineer and member of the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 99 in Upper Marlboro, Maryland "She was all about loving your neighbor and was a great listener."

Kathleen said her grandmother understood that local women needed to support each other while cognizant of the county's cultural conservatism. "Their husbands might have been suspicious about them going to a meeting of a 'women's group,'" she said. "So, my grandmother 'planted' less threatening ideas like a quilting club or a committee to establish a used bookstore."

Marilyn Moors found a soul mate in Ina Hicks, another former Montgomery County resident, who had deep roots in northern Garrett County. Ina Jenkins Hicks was born in Friendsville in 1930. She grew up on Morris Avenue, along the Yough. Her father, John "Red" Jenkins, operated a restaurant and barbershop attached to the house.

"Mom was 40 when I was born and Pop was 45," said Hicks. "The times were hard with banks closed and people's savings [depleted]. But as a child I would walk freely around town when my father and mother were busy with the barbershop and restaurant [converted to a bar after Prohibition]. Neighbors would invite me in for meals and conversation."

Her brother, one of four much older siblings, taught elementary school in the southern county. He convinced Hicks she would have an easier time getting into college if she traveled across the county to Oakland High School. She lived with him in Oakland for her last two years of school and graduated in 1947, then attended the University of Maryland in College Park.

Hicks' mother was a Lutheran. Her father belonged to the Church of the Brethren. While in college, Hicks became a Quaker. Bob Hicks, whom she married in her senior year, worked as a schoolteacher and, later, a salesman for Ryland Construction Co. in Columbia, Md. while Ina raised their seven children.

In 1976, after living in Howard and Frederick Counties and spending a short stint in Costa Rica, Ina and Bob Hicks moved back to her native Garrett County with their two youngest children. They bought a Friendsville farm not far from the property owned by Bill and Marilyn Moors. "We were a post-hippie, back-to-the-land group," said Hicks.

"Because of my roots in the county, I felt like a bridge between the transplants and the locals," added Hicks, who, at the request of some new and longtime residents, began holding Quaker meetings, convening a worship group that grew to about twenty.

"Cosmic" Jim Naeseth, one of the newcomers, came from Staunton, Virginia. and set up a natural foods store and art gallery in the former Fox Hardware store in Friendsville purchased by his father. The large store also housed an acupuncture clinic opened by Will Wadsworth, another recent arrival, who held classes in

massage. Hicks said the store hosted “trade shows” promoting businesses selling herbs and other products and introducing locals to other practitioners of “different arts of healing.”

Hicks, Moors and others formed a women’s drumming circle where, she said, “We would do readings and share new ideas.” Some southern county residents joined the circle. Hicks’ appreciation of the county’s history then led to a job.

In 1981, the Friend Family Association moved into a new national headquarters in a former bank building donated by the town of Friendsville. Three years later, the group hired Hicks as a librarian and genealogist. She helped Friend family members across the globe find their roots.

After moving back to Garrett County, Hicks said she had few relationships with people in the southern end of the county until the 1990s, when she worked with Jane Avery, a Pittsburgh native who founded Our Town Theatre in Oakland.

Morgantown, W.Va is only 11 miles further from Friendsville than Oakland. So, many residents spent more time shopping there than in Oakland, said Hicks. And she recalled Morgantown residents coming into Friendsville for women’s meetings, natural foods and art projects.

Hicks said, “Politics in Friendsville was always a mix of Republicans and Democrats.” Spencer Schlosnagle, the town’s Democratic mayor, was first elected in 1986 at age 21, the youngest mayor ever elected in Maryland. He was elected to his 19th term in 2022. His story attests to the power of local roots in the town of 564 people.

The son of owners of a grocery and clothing shop, Schlosnagle drew national attention and derision after he was arrested several times for indecent exposure. Schlosnagle contended his behaviors were the result of a childhood sexual assault and sought counseling. He continued to win elections, instituting a comprehensive development plan and winning grants for a new water plant, park and Head Start building.

Rob Smith first arrived in Friendsville in 1976 at age 25. A native of Silver Spring, Maryland, Smith was descended from Samuel Smith. A part-time Mountain Lake Park resident, Sam Smith, in the 1830’s was appointed stockholder director of the B&O Railroad by the state to help the railroad emerge from bankruptcy.

After high school, Rob Smith built a thriving business in the Washington D.C. suburbs, providing sound systems to outdoor concerts. When the business hit a rough spell, he shut it down and moved to New York City, where he worked as a

sound engineer and a singer/songwriter, collaborating with Artie Resnick, best known for the Drifter's classic, "Under the Boardwalk."

"I was totally done with city living," said Smith, who left New York, rented some land in Friendsville, and started working as a "one-man home improvement contractor" in the area. Soon after his arrival, Smith heard that a strip mine was planned, located above Buffalo Run, the trout stream near his 10-acre home site. Concerned the strip mine owner had made no preparations for safe storm water drainage; he fought the project. Smith's battle drew attention in the *Washington Post.*

"I didn't know a lot about the politics around mining. Before I lost [the challenge to the strip mine] I got a lot of flak [from neighbors]," said Smith. And indifference from county leaders.

"Garrett County's commissioners mostly stayed away from the issue of strip mining," said former county administrator Marshall Rickert. He added that the commissioners' efforts were focused only on regulating mining in the Deep Creek Lake watershed.

Back in 1976, Rob Smith couldn't have known that his personal fight against a single strip mine was a precursor to a conflict that deeply involved and divided many northern county residents—the successful seven-year fight against hydraulic fracturing (fracking) for natural gas in the 2000s.

In 2017, Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan signed a bill banning fracking in Maryland, the first state with exploitable natural gas to restrict the method. Hogan's action raised his approval ratings.

Marilyn Moors, Ina Hicks and several younger Friendsville residents were wholly engaged in the fracking struggle. They offered tours to media workers and interested citizens showing them the farms and pristine venues where, without a ban, drilling would take place. Fracking opponents in the northern and southern ends of the county lobbied legislators and worked to convince their neighbors that fracking's economic benefits were not worth the risks to water, land, animals, and tourism.

Their activism reflected historic differences. Southern and northern county opponents of fracking both lobbied legislators and conducted public education. But southern county opponents were more politically cautious in their approach. They reached out to the county's board of realtors and business interests primarily concerned that fracking could discourage visitors and investors from urban and suburban areas.

Northern county activists reached out nationwide to environmentalists of all stripes, raising the profile of the dispute inside and outside the state.They banked on a total ban on fracking in the legislature, rather than advocating an incremental "fall back" position.

The fracking battle was reminiscent of the prior conflict over the Yough's designation as a scenic and wild river, albeit lacking the threats of violence. The Garrett County Farm Bureau supported fracking as a means for farmers to derive more income from leasing property to the natural gas companies.

Western Maryland's Building trades unions also supported the extraction method in the hope that members who had been traveling long distances for work in West Virginia and Pennsylvania could find work closer to home. State Sen. George Edwards and Del. Wendell Beitzel advocated fracking as a step toward greater prosperity in the county.

"The money [from fracking] stays in the county, stays with the local people, enabled farms to buy new tractors, paint their houses, maintain the farm, keep the farms," Beitzel told WBAL-TV news on Feb. 6, 2015.

Fracking supporters pointed to the county's history back to the 1950s as a producer of natural gas. They derided the intervention of privileged outsiders who they claimed had no respect for the hard work of farmers who needed to lease land for natural gas to help keep their family farms. They claimed that the outsiders exaggerated the dangers of fracking.

But some of the outsiders had become insiders, folks like Jesse Whittemore, the self-professed "kayak maniac." In the 1980s, after losing the legal battle to keep his business running, he decided to fight politically by running a campaign for Friendsville City Council.

"I dragged all of my friends out of the bars and went door-to-door to get elected," said Whittemore. In 2016, still serving on the council, he introduced and passed an ordinance to ban fracking within Friendsville's city limits. The action helped to energize the anti-fracking forces nationwide.

Gov. Larry Hogan failed to inform fellow Republicans Sen. Edwards and Del. Beitzel before announcing the fracking ban. Edwards was highly popular among his fellow state legislators in both chambers.

Hogan's disrespect was noted by constituents and political adversaries. "I cried when I saw George being treated that way by the governor," said Sen. Kathy Klausmeier (D-Balt. County), assistant majority leader of the state senate, who supported the ban.

Fracking opponents won an important battle, but even some of their oldest stalwarts went right back to work in the community after the battle.

Into the 2000s, Ina Hicks, 94, was still answering calls for families engaged in genealogical research. And she was still working with the Friendsville quilters, first convened by Marilyn Moors, working alongside fellow quilters Mary Enlow Frazee, wife of roads striker, Floyd Frazee. Mimi Demaree was another quilter who, with her husband, owns Demaree Inflatable Boats Inc., based in Friendsville. Demaree and her husband both came to the county as kayakers in the 1970s.

The county's north-south divide persists. But GCCAC's Duane Yoder helped initiate a unique step to bring together the county's far-flung incorporated towns.

The county's eight towns, with population totals ranging from 321 to 2,000, were under pressure from the state in the early 2000s to develop "smart growth" plans. Yoder spoke to federal representatives at Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and arranged for the mayors to jointly develop common plans.

In 2014, the bi-partisan group of mayors (representing a total of 7,000 residents), established Garrett County Municipalities Inc. Meeting monthly, the mayors share equipment, ideas, personnel, and other resources.

"A bunch of mayors took a bus trip to Garrett County to see what we were doing. They were shocked at how well mayors here get along," said Carolyn Corley, a former teacher, principal and former mayor of Loch Lynn, population about 600.

To better coordinate collective efforts across the county, GCCAC has for many years employed a "circuit rider" to travel between the towns, keeping commissioners in the information loop, writing community block grants, and helping define priorities.

Cultural Conflicts

During the 1974 to 1978 commission term, cultural conflicts arose alongside regulation of Deep Creek Lake and the Yough. The county's educational curriculum led the list, leading to a long fight over the selection and composition of the county's school board

In 1975, Del. DeCorsey Bolden introduced a bill calling for an elected school board in Garrett County. During that era, Maryland's governor appointed most school boards across the state, selecting candidates from lists submitted by county leaders. Contention escalated between supporters and opponents of an elected school board, an issue raised one year earlier by local attorney Tom Doyle in his unsuccessful campaign against Hamilton.

Supporting an elected board, McHenry resident Nina Wagner, chairman of "Citizens for Integrity and Decency" argued the local school board should not be a "rubber stamp" for the state [board of education].

The group said the county's citizens had a right to select school board members who would be deciding curriculum, school construction, appointments, and dismissals. The county's schools had instituted "open classrooms," to qualify for more state funding, removing internal walls between classrooms. The group said it opposed "controversial issues like "humanistic open education" and sex education.

The May 13, 1976, issue of *The Republican* published an ad opposing an elected school board from the "Garrett County Citizens for Quality Education."

Col. J. Haig Jackson, Wayne Hamilton and other county leaders signed the ad. Opponents included the League of Women Voters. An elected school board, they said, would result in "unqualified" residents with no experience in public education implementing educational policy.

They argued that the election advocates would unreasonably raise board salaries. Their plan would divide the board into districts, enabling candidates to win seats who would have not been chosen in at-large elections across the county.

Striking a populist tone, elected school board advocates argued that even candidates for U.S. Congress were not required to have prior experience in government. Supporters of an elected school board lost in 1976. But, in 1982, Garrett County voters approved a referendum calling for an elected school board.

Another long-running conflict between religious fundamentalists and most of the county's business leaders was resolved in the 1976 general election referendum, with voters approving Sunday liquor sales by a vote of 4,764 to 1,837.

New Round of Negotiations

During the 1974-1978 term, commissioners faced requests for pay increases from teachers, school bus contractors and road workers. Private employers and unions in the region faced strikes. On the economic development front, a new coal mine operation opened in Grantsville. But commissioners were disappointed at the failure to attract a new manufacturing plant to Friendsville.

In April 1976, commissioners negotiated a new contract with the Garrett County Teachers Association, represented by Judy France, Linda Samec, James

Zimmerman, Melvin Schwing, Robert Yunker and the association's president, Harold Humberson.

The contract provided for $400 per year increases in pay for starting teachers. Fringe benefits were increased, class size reduced, and a grievance procedure established. Despite the pay increases, an article in *The Republican* after the settlement still listed the county's teachers as the lowest paid in the state. The teachers' contract was soon followed by the expiration of the county's contract with AFSCME covering the roads workers.

Just two years before, AFSCME Council 67 again made the national news. On July 1, 1974, municipal workers in Baltimore City went on a wildcat strike. They were protesting a contract that was recommended by AFSCME Local 44 President Ray Clarke, who had led the caravans to Oakland during the roads strike. The Baltimore wildcat involved most workers in the city, including sewer, highway and sanitation workers and jail guards. Police stayed on the job but engaged in job actions in support of the strikers.

Newly elected Baltimore Mayor William Donald Schaefer and Gov. Marvin Mandel both actively opposed the strike. Before it was settled on July 15, Clarke and fellow union leaders Ernie Crofoot and P.J. Ciampa were threatened with jail. A circuit court judge froze the union's assets, and the union was forced to pay $90,000 for disrupting the city's services.

The 1970 roads strike and AFSCME's Baltimore City battle were close enough to still provide leverage for the union's negotiators and a cautionary narrative for the commissioners. Local 1834, represented by President James Hinebaugh, Kenneth Fike, Kenneth Savage and William Yoder, sought parity with roads workers in Allegany County and employees of the state's highway department.

The commissioners and Local 1834 reached an impasse in negotiations. *The Republican* reported, "Both sides wanted to avoid a recurrence of the long [1970] strike." Commissioners agreed to request mediation and said the current contract, covering 150 workers, would remain in effect if agreement was not reached by the August 15 deadline. The contract was settled on August 19, 1976, providing for $1.19 in raises over three years.

Union struggles and the future of manufacturing and mining in the county continued to draw headlines during the commission term.

In September 1976, ninety workers at Harbison-Walker's refractory plant struck for a day and a half over seniority. *The Republican* reported that the "plant was vandalized, and windows were broken."

In November 1977, a sportswear manufacturing company considered establishing operations in the old Friendsville Elementary School. Tom Jones, the county's director of economic development, conducted a survey in a 20-mile radius of Friendsville to determine how many residents would be available to work in the proposed factory. The poor response led the manufacturer to decide against setting up operations there.

In February 1978, commissioners and the Garrett County Teachers Association failed to reach agreement on a new contract. Both sides requested that Maryland's Superintendent of Schools, David Hornbeck, mediate the dispute. The contract was approved in May.

An August 1978 wildcat strike by members of International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 2308 at VEPCO's coal-fired power plant in Mt. Storm, W. Va., 19 miles south of Oakland, drew prominent coverage in *The Republican.* Forty workers were fired, their discharges upheld by the National Labor Relations Board.

1978 Commission Election

Two years after Hamilton's victory as the lone Democrat on the board of commissioners, he and his fellow board members applied for federal aid to replace the county's unsafe and aging jail that had been condemned by both the state and the Garrett County grand jury.

The commissioners were shocked to receive a $3.4 million grant as part of a federal anti-recession program. It was the 14th largest grant nationwide to a county government. Hamilton, Bender and Edwards proposed a new jail and court complex. The new infrastructure would, however, obstruct one of the facades of Oakland's well-loved courthouse. No opposition to the project was voiced during pre-application public hearings. But a fierce storm of protest developed after its announcement.

Citizens denounced the defacement of the courthouse, a favorite place for picnics, walks and photos. Opponents asked the commission to reject the federal dollars. The commissioners refused and the construction began.

On May 13, 1978, Hamilton and Republican Ernie Gregg, the well-known pharmacist, then vying for Hamilton's commission seat, traded verbal blows over the courthouse and other issues. Gregg said the jail renovation and courthouse project was a "monument to the intrusion of federal philosophy that money can solve all problems."

As county commissioner, Gregg said, “I will not bow and grovel before the mighty federal grant because I know it brings with it federal control and red tape for Garrett County.”

Ignoring the county commission’s lack of authority, Gregg also called for the county to “take control” of the Yough’s scenic and wild river program from the state, stating, “Property rights are basic in a free society.”

Gregg blamed Hamilton for fiscal irresponsibility. He said Hamilton would often win federal grants without paying attention to how the county’s matching funds would be covered. And he attacked Hamilton for nepotism in the 1976 appointment of Hamilton’s son, Brooks, to the county’s board of education even after the Republican Central Committee had recommended Gregg for the appointment.

In an open letter published in *The Republican*, Hamilton accused Gregg of opportunism, maintaining that Gregg had approved the courthouse project and the architectural drawings as a member of the Oakland Merchant and Businessmen’s Association, along with several civic and fraternal organizations.

Hamilton contended that private sector jobs in the county had increased more than 45 percent over the prior eight years. Accusing Gregg of having no vision, he said, “It looks as though you’ve just mouthed the tired old thinking of your political ‘advisors,’ the same anti-progress attitude that led to the road strike eight years ago.”

Republican Dominance Restored

Gregg beat Hamilton by a vote of 3,688 to 2,768. While Hamilton’s fellow commissioners, Bender and Edwards, had also supported the jail/courthouse project, some Republicans believed Hamilton bore greater political heat simply because he was a Democrat.

Herb McCrobie, a Republican and former county roads engineer, said: “Wayne Hamilton was a good man, one of the most honest in the county. They [the commissioners] had money available to remodel the courthouse. They had to do it [deploy the funds] quickly. They hired an architect.”

Added McCrobie, “I’m a Republican. But Wayne [Hamilton] caught hell because he was a Democrat. George Edwards [Republican] was pushing for the project, too.”

The culture and economics of the county had moved decisively away from the conservative fundamentalism of Ross Sines and his supporters. But with the

1978 election, newly elected Commissioner Gregg, along with other newcomers, Truman Paugh and Lester Hunter, returned the county to its Republican roots.

In 1982, John Braskey, a Grantsville Democrat, won a seat on the board of commissioners. He was elected three more times. He resigned in 1997, one year short of the end of his term and went to work for Maryland's Department of Natural Resources. Democrat Gary Fratz, an Accident farmer, replaced Braskey for one year, ran for a full term, but was not elected. As of 2025, no Democrat since has won a commission seat in the county.

The Last Democrat

"You are what your parents were," said Braskey, a graduate of Fairmount [WV] State University. "My parents were Democrats and Catholics. They owned Hilltop Inn, a restaurant in Grantsville." Braskey taught English at Northern High School for a time and then managed the Foodland grocery in Grantsville.

Republican Tom Gearhart, a childhood friend, later the human resources director at Mettiki's mine, managed Braskey's 1982 campaign for commissioner. Braskey recalled the county's political battles over alcohol. After announcing his candidacy, he immediately received questionnaires pressing him to oppose Sunday liquor sales. Braskey supported Sunday sales against strong support from many Grantsville residents, including an influential contingent of Mennonites.

"I worked hard," said Braskey. "I went door to door and visited every county roads department garage, the rescue squads and power companies." Braskey beat the Republican president of the county's board of education, Harlan Dale DeWitt, owner of the Towne Restaurant in Oakland.

"I don't know if there were a lot of differences locally between Democrats and Republicans. But when I ran for commissioner in 1982, we [Democrats] had trouble filling out a ticket," said Braskey.

"I was independent from the Garrett County Democratic Club," he said, noting that state Del. B.O. Aiken, an accomplished legislator, had lost his office in 1970 "just because he was a Democrat."

Braskey, who served as president of the Maryland Association of Counties (MACO), said Grantsville's Republicans, led by the Edwards family, were generally "moderate." But he remembered facing strong opposition from ultra-conservative residents in Sang Run and Friendsville. One of his most determined adversaries was building an airplane when Braskey visited his garage.

“There was a large box [the size of a casket] with my name on it,” said Braskey. “I never worked the party line,” said Braskey. “I was a moderate Democrat and Elwood Groves was a conservative Republican. But we worked real well together.”

Said Braskey, "You always associate unions with Democrats. But one thing that amazed me was that, if you go back and check, 80 percent of the road workers who went on strike [in 1970] were Republicans."

The numbers have become more skewed in the decades since. As of 2024, Garrett County’s registered Republicans totaled 13,660. Registered Democrats numbered 3,522.

“State Sen. George Edwards always reminded me that our members overwhelmingly vote Republican,” said Jody Oliver, Executive Director of the Western Maryland Central Labor Council (AFL-CIO) and an AFSCME member.

The gender homogeneity of the county commission briefly cracked in 1990 with the election of Brenda Butscher, director of the county’s hospice and co-owner of the local radio station. Butscher, chair of the county’s Republican central committee, campaigned for term limits, better equipment on the county roads and more progressive policy to support mentally ill citizens. She advocated for and won a crisis shelter for abused spouses and their children.

Butscher was unseated in the Republican primary campaign in 1994, losing overwhelmingly to Roger Glotfelty, who won the general election. No woman has been elected to the commission since.

Collective Bargaining Struggle Renewed

Fifty years after the road strike ended, all of Garrett County’s public employees (except for school teachers) still lacked state-sanctioned collective bargaining. And AFSCME still lacked the political leverage that Ray Metz and other leaders had built in neighboring Allegany County.

Perhaps Ernie Gregg, the long-serving county commissioner—comparing himself to his predecessors—best represented the perspective on the future of collective bargaining in Garrett County.

“Ross Sines and I had very different ideas about what a community should be. You can’t be ‘anti’ everything. None of us have ever gotten everything we wanted,” said Gregg, who began his political career by defeating Sines in the 1978 Republican primary.

After Gregg's election in 1979, the county ran out of money one month before the end of the fiscal year, leaving no money to pay roads workers. Gregg, the newly elected commissioner, called their union leaders and informed them of the situation.

"We brought the unemployment [benefits] people in," said Gregg, who aimed to keep some steady income coming in for the crews. When the new fiscal year started, said Gregg, "We brought the union in [to develop the new budget].

"Over the years, there were contract renewals [with Local 1834]," said Gregg, noting that Ernie Crofoot, AFSCME's leader during the roads strike, was "kind of tough, but he was reasonable. "Negotiations went on, but it wasn't contentious."

Looking at the area's labor-management relationships, Gregg said the union and the company at the Luke paper mill also "coexisted amicably."

Gregg traveled to New York with other political leaders to lobby for the county's bond rating to be upgraded. At a workshop sponsored by the Maryland Association of Counties, he was seated with Baltimore Mayor William Donald Schaefer, the politically shrewd urban Democrat.

The Republican commissioner from the wilderness county and Willie Don embarked on a friendship that lasted through Schaefer's two terms as Maryland governor.

Gregg said he took similar pride in establishing a constructive relationship with AFSCME Local 1834 during his tenure as a commissioner. However, during his 24-years on the commission, he opposed the union's drive to institute state-sanctioned, countywide collective bargaining, saying, "People in the county just weren't interested in that."

The roads workers with whom Gregg bargained weren't giving up the fight. Several years after Gregg's tenure ended, Commissioners Jim Raley and Bob Gatto declared their support for collective bargaining.

Raley, a high school shop teacher, was elected chairman of the Garrett County Board of Commissioners in 2012 after serving 14 years on the county's school board.

"My dad was a 40-year union railroad mechanic," said Raley. "He taught me I wasn't going to 'lie on the ground' for work." Raley decided to teach school after completing college in 1980.

"I chose to join the Garrett County Teachers Association (GCTA) instead of the American Federation of Teachers because the NEA [National Education Association-GCTA's parent union] was the union with the most clout in the state," said Raley. "And I got involved in politics."

As a teacher/activist, Raley supported the unsuccessful campaign in Annapolis for a bill that would have enabled Garrett County's public employees to establish agency [union] shops. The measure would have obligated employees who didn't join either teacher's union in the county to pay fees to support the unions' collective bargaining and representative responsibilities.

Del. George Edwards, the former county commissioner, who was elected to the Maryland House in 1983, had supported the teachers' agency shop initiative. But Western Maryland's sitting state senator blocked the measure.

Raley was elected to the county commission with the support of AFSCME Local 1834 and members of the teachers' unions. He decided to make another run at legislative authority from the state to mandate collective bargaining for the county's roads workers and others who might organize in the future.

"The road workers union was recognized in 1970," said Raley, "but there was nothing binding. It was 'meet and confer' ['good faith' exchange of information and proposals]. This was about the future and I thought these guys should have a right to collective bargaining."

George Edwards was elected state senator in 2007. Wendell Beitzel, the former county sanitarian, replaced Edwards as delegate. The two legislators made a joint commitment to Raley to support collective bargaining if *two of the three* county commissioners opted to support the measure.

Raley enlisted the support of fellow commissioner Bob Gatto to support collective bargaining. The third commissioner, Gregan Crawford, opposed.

"My dad was a coal miner and president of his United Mineworkers local union at North Branch Mine in Grant, West Virginia," said Gatto, a self-employed electrician. "My attitude was these [road workers] were good guys and deserved" collective bargaining.

Raley encouraged the county roads workers to attend a pre-legislative session town hall meeting with Beitzel and Edwards. Fifty showed up to hear Raley's plea for the delegate and senator to support collective bargaining.

Raley then went to Annapolis to support Edwards and Beitzel's introduction of a collective bargaining bill. There, Beitzel told Raley he would not support the measure. Edwards informed Raley that if Beitzel opposed collective bargaining, he would have no choice but to oppose it.

Edwards later told the *Cumberland Times-News* that Raley and Gatto were the ones to blame for the lack of progress on collective bargaining, telling reporters, "Raley and Gatto owed me and Wendell information about the impact of a change in collective bargaining policy."

Edwards said he never received the data, thus “could not make a final decision on collective bargaining.”

Raley took issue with Edwards’ claim, contending he had sent emails addressing the legislators’ “specific concerns.” Raley told the *Times-News*: “[Even] with two commissioners in support of this legislation, [county workers] are going to continue to operate the way we always have [bargaining] without a mandate.”

The collective bargaining issue resurfaced later in a petition campaign coordinated by an improbable advocate. Tom Gearhart had served as human resources director of nonunion Mettiki Coal LLC before the underground mine in the southernmost tip of Garrett County was shut down in 2006.

Employed as a private contractor in labor relations after the mine’s closure, Gearhart volunteered to work with a friend, Garrett County Roads Department worker David Sines, to lobby for collective bargaining in the county. The roads department had recruited Sines as a backhoe operator in 1998.

Gearhart and Sines, Ross Sines’ nephew, circulated a petition supporting collective bargaining.

“Very few people refused to sign the petition,” said Gearhart, who speculated that if the issue were put to a referendum, it would have passed. “If folks said [when presented with a petition] they didn’t believe in unions, I’d tell them that I and the other workers at Mettiki wouldn’t have made the money we did if it wasn’t for the United Mineworkers [threatening to organize the mine],” said Gearhart.

Continued Gearhart, who also served on the Garrett County Liquor Board and as the county’s military veterans’ advisor, “The union [AFSCME Local 1834] had agreed to a no-strike clause and membership was voluntary. There was simply no good reason for Edwards and Beitzel to obstruct collective bargaining…I think Raley and Gatto had turned over the facts [requested by Edwards and Beitzel] but were sabotaged."

Recalling his advocacy for collective bargaining, David Sines said, “I’ll be honest. I wasn’t 100 percent for the union or 100 percent against the union when I got hired.”

Sines said, “After a conflict with a roads’ supervisor, [backed by] Garrett County Administrator Monty Pagenhart over sick pay, I was 100 percent union. The way I understood it, [without collective bargaining], we could go into work any morning and they could say we didn’t have a job. I was amazed at the amount of people who supported us.”

The petition campaign failed to move Edwards and Beitzel to reconsider their position. But David Sines said he believes the increased union activity contributed to the firing of a foreman in the Accident garage who was said to be "giving the union members a hard time."

"There's a 'good ol' boys network in Garrett County. Hell will freeze over before they allow any unionism," said Raley. "I had promoted union stuff as a teacher. I wrote letters to the newspapers. I was frowned upon [for supporting unions]."

Gatto confronted anti-union hostility more directly. Attending a Chamber of Commerce meeting soon after expressing his support for collective bargaining, Gatto said, "They [Chamber members] went ballistic and said they would give me a chance to 'correct my wrong.'"

The struggle to encode collective bargaining took a stronger turn in neighboring Allegany County, where AFSCME was organizing non-professional employees in the county's schools and the county's highway workers.

In April 1967, the Allegany County Board of Education obtained an injunction against AFSCME, which, according to the *Cumberland News,* represented a "small percentage" of employees. The injunction enjoined workers from striking or picketing "any time schools were in session."

AFSCME told the newspaper, "Let the Allegany County Teachers Association 'take the ball' [in the negotiations] with the board of commissioners." Six months later, AFSCME achieved more success organizing the county's highway workers, collecting authorization cards from 200 workers.

The Allegany County Board of Commissioners announced they would recognize AFSCME "within the framework of existing law of the state."

The commissioners then provocatively enumerated the extreme limitations of the law they claimed to uphold. They said they would *not* negotiate a collective bargaining agreement. And they *opposed* recognizing the union as the sole bargaining agent. They would not compel workers to join the unit, institute dues check-off, or grant workers the right to strike or hear their grievances.

Undeterred, AFSCME continued to push Allegany County on collective bargaining. A breakthrough came in 1974, when the county commissioners enhanced their authority, opting for "code home" rule. The same year, Metz and AFSCME won a collective bargaining law covering public workers in Allegany County.

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Metz recalled hosting a dinner for the Western Maryland state delegation in Annapolis at the Fort Cumberland Hotel. He told the legislators, “If you guys can’t go along with county-wide collective bargaining, we [AFSCME] are going to work against you in the next election.” Mel Sloan, the Republican state delegate from the industrial town of Lonaconing, drew up a collective bargaining bill covering Allegany County. It passed.

AFSCME’s political clout in Allegany County was still intact decades later. In 1994, former Republican State Sen. John Bambacus, once a friend of organized labor, was elected mayor of Frostburg, the college town bordering Garrett County.

John Gates, the Cumberland-born AFSCME staffer who serviced Local 1834 after the roads strike, had coordinated an effective phone banking effort to elect Bambacus, a Marine Corps Vietnam veteran, defeating an anti-labor opponent.

After Bambacus’s victory, AFSCME asked him to support a collective bargaining ordinance for Frostburg’s public workers. Bambacus refused. AFSCME vowed to punish Bambacus for his anti-union stance.

One year after Bambacus’s election as mayor, newly elected Democratic Gov. Parris Glendening notified AFSCME he was considering Bambacus to be his labor secretary.

“Glendening called us at the labor council office and asked what we thought about Bambacus being secretary of labor," said Gates. "We said, ‘No Way.’ He never got to be labor secretary."

Even in the throes of Allegany County’s unions losing thousands of members to deindustrialization and global trade, AFSCME had retained some of the strength that unions in Garrett County never achieved.

Perhaps Cumberland’s Davey Lewis, who served in the U.S. Congress between 1931 and 1939, best exemplified the more labor-oriented brand of Allegany County politics. Once a coal miner with limited reading skills, Lewis, the Republican son of Welsh immigrants, studied Latin under a local parish priest. He earned a law degree, and transferred his registration from Republican to Democrat.

In 1935, Lewis introduced the Social Security bill in Congress, arguably the most popular government program ever established, saving thousands of working families from penury.

Union Organizing in County

Garrett County roads workers had greatly improved their pay and benefits after AFSCME was legally recognized as their representative. But AFSCME couldn't replicate its collective bargaining success in Allegany County, limiting its ability to recruit more wilderness county members.

The county's utility department (water and sewer) remained unorganized. "We [employees] talked about a union several times and we talked to workers in the roads department [comparing wages and benefits]," said James Beckman, a utility department retiree.

Beckman recalled Del. Wendell Beitzel, then director of Garrett County's Sanitary District, coming to a meeting of utility department workers. Beitzel warned workers: "If you even talk about a union, you're fired."

Some success was achieved in the county's private sector. But losses overwhelmed successes. In 1958, one year after the plant opened, Teamsters Local 453 began representing workers at Sterling Processing alongside the Meat Cutters (later United Food and Commercial Workers). Both unions later attempted to extend their reach in the county.

In August 1970, two weeks after the battle of the bus, Silver Knob Sand Co. in Oakland signed a three-year contract with Teamsters Local 453. *The Republican* reported that 29 workers at the plant, which manufactured concrete blocks and other masonry projects, would receive a 40-cents-an hour increase, then 25-cents each year. The contract provided for seniority rights, six paid holidays, $26.24 per month in health and welfare benefits, job classification and vacations, according to Teamster Business Agent Joseph Freno.

In March 1971, the Teamsters signed a two-year contract at Country Belle Dairy in Grantsville. The same year, the union lost a 13 to 4 vote at Hawkinson Tread in Oakland, a tire recapping facility owned by Fred Glotfelty, and failed again at a campaign at HP Stores, headquartered in Loch Lynn Heights outside of Oakland.

In 1972, the Teamsters' hopes were crushed when Bausch and Lomb defeated the union's campaign to organize its rapidly growing workforce by a vote of 118 to 66. Tim Brant, the son of roads striker Harold Brant, worked at Bausch and Lomb for five years.

"You didn't want to talk about union there [for fear of retaliation by management]," Brant said. Another Teamster attempt to organize Bausch and Lomb was defeated in 1976 by a vote of 262 to 88.

In 1971, Chapter 171 of the Maryland Classified Employees Association was formed in Oakland, representing school cafeteria and janitorial managers and

others. MCEA organized units in Garrett County Social Services, the Employment Security Administration, the Wildlife Administration, the Maryland State Police, the Natural Resources Police and the Tax Assessor's Office.

Garrett Memorial Hospital Campaign

In 1975, AFSCME's Ray Metz launched another attempt to organize a bargaining unit of food service, maintenance, and laundry personnel at Garrett Memorial Hospital. The unit would not include nurses, lab, and clerical employees.

AFSCME knew it was a long shot. They were still recovering from the stinging 1969 organizing loss at Cumberland Memorial Hospital, where AFSCME's Michael Lindner had convinced the hospital's board of trustees to hold a union certification election. The hospital, confident it would prevail, agreed to a vote. The union lost 250 to 114. The union waited a year and asked for another vote in Cumberland.

Had the Cumberland hospital been privately owned, a new vote would have been granted under the National Labor Relations Act. But the publicly owned hospital, employing 650 total employees, was under no obligation. The trustees refused AFSCME's request for another election. In July 1971, AFSCME called on 350 workers at the Cumberland hospital to strike. Hospital officials told the *Cumberland Evening Times* that more than 90 percent of the workforce reported to work, rejecting the union's call.

One month later, AFSCME leader Ernie Crofoot recommended the hospital's employees accept the recommendation of a state mediator to return to work. The hospital refused to rehire more than 100 workers who had struck. "I had to find work for all 100 of them," said Metz. Metz claimed a union staffer who over promised a successful outcome to the strike was mostly responsible for the workers risking their jobs.

In 1975, seeking to avoid the pitfalls in Allegany County, Metz targeted Garrett County Memorial Hospital (now Garrett Regional Medical Center). The wife of one of Metz's co-workers at the State Highway Department in LaVale worked at Garrett Memorial Hospital.

"I talked to her," said Metz. "I knew there was a lot of labor-management turmoil at the hospital. "We had a lot of people signed up for the union." Metz formed an organizing committee, and, he said, "I made my co-worker's wife the chairperson."

His membership in the American Legion enabled Metz to use a meeting room at the organization's hall across from the hospital. He began holding meetings of workers interested in organizing. Lacking the confidence that the union had sufficient support to win a battle with hospital management, AFSCME abandoned the campaign.

In 1994, the United Food and Commercial Workers, still known locally as "The Meat Cutters," launched another campaign to organize the county's hospital. The union's bargaining unit would have consisted of clerical, technical, housekeeping, dietary, laboratory and radiology staff.

Worker interest in organizing was fueled by the hospital management's decision to alter health insurance benefits and lay off five employees. Ben Rosenthal, the hospital's president, had broadly solicited employees for expense-saving suggestions to help the hospital meet requirements of the Maryland's Health Services Cost Review Commission.

Rosenthal got dozens of responses. But Chris Livingood, a pro-union employee, told *The Republican (*Sept. 22, 1994*)*: "The layoffs were handled improperly." Five employees were escorted to their cars by hospital security personnel; four had more than 20 years of seniority. "[The layoffs] hit the hospital's employees like a bombshell," said Livingood.

Don Sincell, editor and publisher of *The Republican* was serving as chairman of the hospital's board of trustees during the UFCW campaign. Sincell quoted pro-union workers in his coverage and included letters to the editor on both sides of the union campaign.

But Sincell also prominently forwarded anti-union messages to the community that were likely seeded by hospital management in "captive audience" meetings with employees to discourage union support.

The UFCW, wrote Sincell, was not sufficiently experienced to represent hospital workers, because only five percent of the union's membership worked in the healthcare industry. He said the union in other locales had been rejected in decertification votes by some former members and that violence had erupted during some of the union's strikes.

In a signed letter to *The Republican,* 37 hospital workers outlined why they were supporting the union. Upset about layoffs and healthcare cuts, the employees called the union for help.

While attendance at union meetings was voluntary, anti-union meetings on the job were mandatory. The president of Local 27, UFCW had promised there would be no initiation fees and members would incur no dues obligations until 30

days after a contract was signed. A strike could not be called without the support of a two-third majority of the bargaining unit.

Since the hospital was not directly under management of the county, UFCW had a right to an NLRB election. An election was called and AFSCME narrowly lost. The union appealed the results to the NLRB, contending that ten workers allowed to vote were ineligible and the hospital had committed unfair labor practices, “restraining and coercing” employees to defeat the union. The NLRB sustained the UFCW’s arguments and called for a new election.

On Nov. 28, 1995, the hospital’s workforce rejected the union by a vote of 110 to 53. *The Republican* quoted board chairman Donald Sincell, “We had a number of options to consider but were confident that the employees would once again reject the union’s bid and, this time, we believed it would be by an even wider margin, which it was.”

Harry Biggs, the Southern High School teacher who had worked in human resources for Browning’s Foodland, remembered an editorial in *The Republican* mocking the image of “Meat Cutters” organizing hospital workers.

Terry Rinker pointed to a cultural divergence between the union’s organizers from outside the county and the local workforce. Rinker, the son of Local 1834 President Leo Rinker, said the Meat Cutters’ organizers alienated workers by following them to their cars [to talk about joining] in the hospital’s parking lot, noting. “Unions can be intimidating."

“I was very anti-union at the time [of the hospital organizing campaign],” said Norma Hesen, then a nurse at Garrett Memorial Hospital. Hesen grew up in Western Pennsylvania, an area with strong union density. But she said, “My father [owner of a gravestones monument business] was opposed to unions.”

Hesen’s husband, William Hesen, managed the Coca-Cola bottling plant in Oakland. “The union was hitting [attempting to organize] everything, including the Coke plant,” said Hesen, “My husband fought very hard not to have a union at Coca-Cola.”

The union lost its representation election at Coca-Cola. “Workers at the hospital and Coca Cola didn’t need a union,” said Hesen. Their employers were “not like” the mine owners who mistreated workers in Western Pennsylvania, “when John L. Lewis [United Mineworkers] came into the mines.”

Perhaps the most significant failure of unions to establish a stronger base in Garrett County was the rejection of United Mineworkers organizers at Mettiki’s mine under Backbone Mountain, close to the West Virginia border, 12 miles south of Oakland.

Opened in 1977, Mettiki was the largest mine in Maryland, employing 600 workers at its peak. While the UMW never secured a foothold in the mine, competition from union-organized mines set a standard for pay and benefits, resulting in an average wage at Mettiki in 1999 twice the family income in Garrett County. "Mettiki could always throw up their dollars [to keep the union out]," said Harry Biggs.

Tom Gearhart started working as human resources director at Mettiki in 1978. He remembers meeting a United Mineworker organizer who was waiting at the plant gate to solicit union members. "He was in a Corvette and looked like he had been drinking," said Gearhart. "I gave him [the handbill] I was going to distribute [opposing the union] and I asked him for a copy of his. I told him if we [Mettiki] haven't done our job and weren't treating people decently, it would be 'too late for us,' and the union would win."

Gearhart said some of the "coal baron-type" bosses at Mettiki violated the National Labor Relations Act to thwart the Mineworkers, interrogating workers, and promising pay increases if workers didn't vote for the union. The illegal carrot and stick tactics were unnecessary, said Gearhart. Mettiki's wages, averaging $66,000 a year compared to an average of $35,000 in the area, were sufficient to undercut any support for United Mineworker representation at Mettiki.

Organizing failures only reinforced the negative image of unions that prevailed in the local press.

Organized Labor's Image

Prior to 1977, when Don Sincell took over editorship of *The Republican* from his great-uncle, George Hanst, many national stories were credited to the U.S. Press Association Inc., an ideologically rightwing, overtly anti-union source.

"I don't know where my great-uncle got those [U.S. Press Association Inc.] releases, but I doubt that *The Republican* paid for them," said Sincell in 2021.

Hanst frequently ran editorials or printed letters calling upon political leaders to clamp down on local and national labor unrest. The newspaper supported a national "right-to-work" law, attacked an increase in the federal minimum wage as "inflationary" and opposed public assistance for workers on strike.

After taking over, Sincell began purchasing stories from the more mainstream United Press International, founded in 1958. UPI's coverage of organized labor was more objective than Hanst's source. But it still mostly focused on strikes and other

economic disruptions. Those stories often stirred residents to send in letters criticizing unions.

In paid ads in *The Republican* during the 1970 strike, AFSCME communicators effectively outlined the benefits of collective bargaining to both the workers and the wider community. After the strike was won, AFSCME shelved its public communications.

"Local 1834 did what so many unions do, and it's a costly mistake," said Matthew Bates, a retired professor of journalism and communications at Trinity Washington College in Washington, D.C., formerly a tool and die maker for Pratt and Whitney Aircraft.

"When negotiations heated up and the strike began, AFSCME sent in staff to help the local reach out to the public to tell their side of the story and rally support for the union. And they were very successful," said Bates, a former associate editor with the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM). "But *after* the crisis," said Bates, the union "went silent" and withdrew from the public conversation.

Bates said, "Garrett County's business leaders and the defenders of the status quo didn't go silent after the strike…A union that reaches out only during a crisis—when it needs something from the community—appears no different than the politicians who show up every few years at election time."

The only county union to effectively communicate to the community in the pages of *The Republican* was the Garrett County Teachers Association. The newspaper periodically published a "Faculty Forum '' column produced by the GCTA. In a Dec. 15, 1977 column, educator Kristin Miller discussed a controversial survey on sex education in the county's public schools.

Addressing parents who declared that the county was "too conservative to accept sex education in the schools," Miller said, "Censorship only goes so far. So does conservatism. Maybe that's the best reason for teaching kids facts instead of suffocating them with a lot of arguments over right and wrong."

The GCTA column was certain to draw some opposing letters. But the educators, unlike the roads' workers, were engaging in and attempting to lead the public conversation. Whatever the unions' approach to the local newspaper and image building, strikes were inevitable.

They sometimes occurred in surprising venues.

Strikes

A year after the roads' settlement, one of the decade's earliest strikes covered by *The Republican* occurred inside the county sheriff's office, not in a local factory. On Nov. 22, 1971, the county's deputy sheriffs walked out for two days to protest the firing of Chief Deputy Sheriff John "June" Evans Jr. and fellow deputy Frank Finch for insubordination.

Finch was on duty during the battle of the bus. His father, Bill Finch, was an outspoken member of AFSCME Local 1834. One month after the deputies walked out, Sheriff Jack Browning, who fired the deputies, was charged by the grand jury for malfeasance in office.

While he wasn't convicted, Browning's political career ended. June Evans was elected sheriff. He rehired Frank Finch as his chief deputy. Later, Finch was elected sheriff.

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In August 1973, after a month of unsuccessful negotiations, 25 members of the Teamsters and the United Food and Commercial Workers struck at Deer Park's bottling operation, setting up round-the-clock picket lines. Joseph Freno, the Teamsters business agent, told *The Republican* workers were seeking increases in overtime pay for holidays and weekends, enhanced job bidding rights and improved vacation pay and scheduling.

In October, 1973, Velma Beckman, one of only three women who worked filling bottles at Deer Park, penned a letter to *The Republican* signed by her striking co-workers. Beckman, the daughter of a coal miner at non-union Turner-Douglas Coal Co., challenged the newspaper's opposition to strikers receiving government benefits.

"We are on strike to make a living wage so that we don't have to rely on welfare…If everyone thought as you [George Hanst and *The Republican*] do, we would be in a sad situation like a lot of Garrett Countians living on starvation wages."

"The men on the job supported me," said Beckman, recalling the strike. "Businesses that came into Garrett County just didn't want to pay anything." In a reply to Beckman, Hanst wrote, "Why doesn't your union to whom you pay dues regularly provide you the emergency funds you need to keep you from starving?"

Several days after the walkout, the unions and Deer Park came to agreement on a new contract. "The managers and the pay at Deer Park were real good,

[despite a few contract disputes] ," said Beckman, who had previously worked for HP Stores and the “five-and-dime” [Ben Franklin Store] in Oakland.

In Feb. 1974, independent truck drivers struck across the nation, demanding a six percent surcharge on their freight rates to cover rising fuel costs. *The Republican* reported on critical shortages of bread, milk, heating oil and gasoline in the county, caused by the work stoppage.

According to the newspaper, truck drivers set up pickets on five state and county roads, turning back trucks delivering food and gasoline. Vandalism was reported on county school buses and shipments of coal from Buffalo Coal Company were slowed. The drivers’ protest shut down county roads' plows, Garrett County schools, and the Sterling Processing chicken plant.

Gilman Sylvester, Sterling’s vice president, issued a detailed account on the strike’s impact, telling the *Cumberland Evening Times* the firm paid “nearly three quarters of a million dollars annually in independent truckers fees, since both the birds [poultry] and the processing byproducts are hauled by truck.”

The Republican’s editorial stated: “We admit that truckers ought to be able to pass on the increase in the price of fuel to the customer and make a decent living, but they have no right to wreck the economy of the county in doing so.”

On Dec. 6, 1977, the United Mineworkers commenced a national strike against the Bituminous Coal Operators Association, protesting the coal producers’ drive to cut health care benefits. *The Republican* reported shortly after the start of the strike, two hundred UMW miners, “presumed to be mostly from nearby Uniontown, Pa.,” picketed Mettiki’s Garrett County operation attempting to stop coal production and construction of new facilities.

Said *The Republican*: “It was suspected that union miners with ball bats and crowbars broke the headlights and windshields of cars of Mettiki personnel … A Mettiki guard, Frank Porter, was reportedly struck by miners and injured.”

The reports, the newspaper said, were “unconfirmed, since none of the vehicle owners reported any such incidents to state police or county sheriffs.”

On Dec. 12, Circuit Court Judge Stuart Hamill, answering a motion from Mettiki’s attorneys (the firm of Burrett & Eiswert), issued a temporary injunction against members of three UMW locals for interfering with operations or personnel at Mettiki. The injunction was made permanent one week later.

The Maryland State Police mobilized tactical units from Pikesville, LaVale, Hagerstown and Frederick to patrol Mettiki, also calling in a helicopter and K-9 dogs. *The Republican* reported that UMW miners “roamed the Allegany County

area of Barton, Luke and Georges Creek," setting a scale house [coal weighing station] on fire at Western Coal Mine.

The UMW's attempts to stop all nonunion coal production during the 110-day strike drew numerous letters to *The Republican*. The newspaper deviated from its stated policy of not printing unsigned letters and published a poem by "Concerned Citizen," entitled, "The Year the UMWA Canceled Christmas."

"Pickets shut all the work down, no matter how hard we tried, we couldn't make ends meet, the little children cried," wrote the poet. "Don't you think it's about time you observed the golden rule? Let others go back to work. Quit acting like a bunch of fools."

A letter responding to the poem from "UMWA Family" said the writer was "quacking like a fool," stating, "If it weren't for unions keeping the minimum wages up for everyone, a lot of workers would be back to rock-bottom wages again."

Responding to another letter supporting the UMW from "A Devoted Coal Miner's Wife," *The Republican* asked, "Why in the world should a nonunion company shut down production just because the union asks them? … As I recall this is a free country."

In March 1978, President Jimmy Carter invoked the Taft-Hartley Act to force striking miners back to work. *The Republican* reported that most of the 100 predominantly nonunion mining companies in Garrett and Allegany Counties that had shut down would be reopening soon.

The newspaper said, "Some mining companies' officials were reluctant to admit they were open." An official with the Maryland Bureau of Mines told the paper he "knew of one mine that was fortified [by management] like an army, [with steel plates and automatic rifles]."

No Western Maryland union mines were still in operation at the time of the strike, but union solidarity was still strong in some Garrett County quarters. In March, 1978, after the move by President Carter, the *Baltimore Evening Sun* interviewed active miners Bill Bolyard and Bobby Stewart, and one retired miner, Kenneth Bray, a former United Mineworker organizer, all residents of Kitzmiller.

All three worked across the Potomac in West Virginia union mines. They opposed any move to force miners to work until they won back medical benefits the coal producers were threatening to cut.

Bolyard, then 39, told the *Sun*: "You can't know what it is like without a union. Before the union, when I broke my back in a cave-in, I got paid $1.14 a day and had to work as soon as I could walk.

"We held the last union election in this county in 1972 in my living room … There were 13 miners here with more than 400 years of experience underground," he said.

Attesting to the fortitude of the area's miners, he said, "These miners were brought up the way I was. When you said your night prayers—between now I lay me down to sleep and amen—you said, 'no contract, no work.'"

The UMW strike refocused attention on the future of the coal industry in the county. On Oct. 13, 1977, *The Republican* reported, the Appalachian Regional Commission granted more than $400,000 to establish a coal mining technology center at Garrett County Community College. The center, which would train miners from "pre-entry through foreman levels," was necessary, the article stated, to fill "1,500 expected vacancies for miners between 1978 and 1982."

Plant Shutdowns

The negative public perceptions of unions, amidst failed organizing drives, the unions' own mistakes, and contentious conflicts in the decade after the roads' workers strike were only reinforced by a series of plant shutdowns that extended into the 2000s.

The anti-union narrative by county commissioners and local business leaders (while denying the material benefits to workers) mostly failed amidst the roads strike. But blaming unions for plant shutdowns carried more sway with the public in Garrett and Allegany Counties and adjoining Morgantown, West Virginia.

The blame game persisted in ensuing years even though most of the shutdowns were linked to competitive challenges—domestic and foreign—that made it impossible for manufacturers to stay in business.

Bausch and Lomb—one of Garrett County's largest employers—had defeated *two* union campaigns before it shut down in 1996. A plant shutdown at Sterling Processing took place *after* both unions in the plant had been severely weakened.

Sterling Processing and "Gig" Sylvester

Sterling Processing, a poultry producer, was the largest employer in Oakland and the third largest employer in the county. In a thinly populated county with only a few sizable workplaces and unions, the story of a single employer—its workers and labor-management conflicts—can resound like a shotgun in a valley.

So it was, time and again, with Sterling Processing and its charismatic general manager, Gilman "Gig" Sylvester, and his protracted battles with unions and federal regulators from his hiring in 1965 until the plant shut down in 1983.

In 1969, J.W. Ruby, Sterling's owner, sold the plant to brothers Ralph and Preston Workman, poultry businessmen from Delaware. The Preston brothers took in Sylvester—who had worked for Ruby—as vice president and general manager. Sylvester continued to negotiate agreements with The Teamsters and the Meat Cutters [Later United Food and Commercial Workers].

Gig Sylvester served as vice president of the county's chamber of commerce and deepened his reputation as a creative innovator who could influence decision makers from Oakland to the U.S. Congress.

Born in 1924 in New Hampshire, Sylvester "was driving chicken trucks before he had a license," said his daughter, Garrett County resident Heidi Kern. He enlisted in the Marines during WWII and transferred to the Eighth Army Air Force, based in England, as a radio operator and tail gunner. An account of his first of 35 B-17 missions over Germany is included in *Remembering World War II,* a book produced by Garrett Community College in 2002:

"Monday, August 14, 1944, 1st Mission. Place- Ludwigshafen, Ger; Target-Oil Refinery; Time-8 hours; Flak-Very Heavy-Ship hit 4 times. Bombardier Hit. But OK. Yes, I was scared over the target-But I bet the Jerries [Germans] were too. So I am satisfied."

Returning from the war, Sylvester ran his own live poultry operation for a short time in Vermont and then worked as a general manager for several of New England's largest poultry processors before J.W Ruby hired him to manage Sterling.

One month after arriving at Sterling, the mayor of Oakland told Sylvester the plant, which consumed 50 percent of the town's water, needed to cut its water usage. The town asked Sylvester to shut down the plant's second shift, which would have displaced workers and disrupted the processing of thousands of turkeys. The town also pressed Sterling to invest in the sewage treatment operation, planned to serve Mt. Lake Park, Oakland, and Loch Lynn.

Sylvester convinced the town not to reduce Sterling's water usage for one year. And he immediately began efforts to build a water treatment plant at Sterling to save the company money that would have been invested in municipal sewage treatment. Following the successful completion of the treatment facility, Sylvester launched a project, financed by grants from the federal Environmental

Protection Agency and the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to recycle Sterling's water.

Over several years, Sylvester waged a high-profile battle with federal officials to get Sterling's reclaimed water declared safe for washing poultry destined for the plant's wide customer base—from kosher poultry distributors to Kentucky Fried Chicken. His photo was prominently featured on the cover of national poultry industry publications; one article displayed a photo of Sylvester drinking water from the recycling plant to demonstrate its safety.

Heidi Kern says her father befriended the celebrated journalist, Jack Anderson (1922-2005), on the writer's visits to Deep Creek Lake.

In a column headlined "Poultry Industry Not 'Chicken' When Fighting U.S. Regulations," Anderson praised Sylvester for spearheading the prototype recycling effort that could significantly reduce water for food processing across the nation. And he compared Sylvester to the Schecter brothers, poultry processors who successfully challenged President Franklin D. Roosevelt in a landmark Supreme Court case, *A.L.A. Schechter Poultry Corporation v. United States*, contesting business regulation in the New Deal.

Anderson wrote: "The power of federal agencies is all-encompassing and a businessman [Sylvester] who challenges the bureaucrats is in about the position of a Golden Glove flyweight stepping into the ring with Muhammad Ali, with one hand tied behind him with red tape."

Oakland's businessmen, many of them fellow WWII veterans, praised Sylvester's challenge of federal authority. And they also followed his growing antagonistic relationship with the Teamsters and the Meat Cutters [later United Food and Commercial Workers]. His contract battles with the unions—which led to a strike in 1973—were for a time overshadowed by another labor battle that was the talk of the town and the national poultry industry.

In 1976, two U.S. Department of Agriculture inspectors working on Sterling's production line walked off the job prior to the end of their shift. Their unattended posts led to the spoilage of 18,000 chickens. Sylvester demanded the inspectors be removed from the plant. The USDA took the inspectors out of the plant for a time, but then reassigned them back to Sterling. Sylvester requested a temporary restraining order to stop Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz from placing the inspectors back in his plant.

Sylvester's request for a restraining order was refused. "I will continue the battle through the courts in the firm belief that justice still exists in America,"

Sylvester told *The Republican.* “Feathers Fly: ‘Chicken Man’ Sylvester Battles Earl Butz,” blared a headline in The *Cumberland Evening Times*, June 28, 1976.

In a letter to the editor of *The Republican*, local attorney Tom Doyle wrote, “Whatever happened to the old American way that used to build the free enterprise system where men worked and were proud of working?

"To those in power, remember you too will have a day of reckoning. For that power stops at the grave.”

Sylvester lost his battle appealing the inspectors’ assignment back to the plant. But the company’s troubles ran far deeper. Transportation costs were taking a large slice of the profits, with chickens now being supplied, not from West Virginia, but from the Preston brothers’ farms in Delaware and Maryland’s Eastern Shore. Legal fees and other costs connected to water treatment were further jeopardizing the company’s bottom line.

In 1981, a year before the expiration of Sterling’s latest contract with the unions, Sylvester unexpectedly shut down the plant. After the shutdown, representatives of the Teamster’s and UFCW contacted Sylvester to request discussions over what the unions could do to get the plant reopened. Sylvester presented no specific steps to reverse the shutdown.

With Oakland’s First National Bank and his lawyers sending bills for overdue payments, Sylvester convinced Cargill Inc., a major U.S. food processor and the largest privately owned U.S. company to consider purchasing the plant for $1.5 million and assume the company’s $150,000 mortgage.

Cargill introduced a six-month trial operation of the plant. Sylvester hired a new lineup of workers, many of them former Sterling employees, through the Maryland State Employment Service. Then he unilaterally set the wages and benefits of the newly hired workers without contacting or negotiating with the unions. Employees were told they would be working for $4.00 per hour with no union, no vacations, holidays, or health insurance. Ninety-two workers were hired. Seventy-nine had formerly worked for Sterling.

Bonnie Chapman, a re-hired employee, circulated a petition, signed by 65 employees, requesting an informal vote by workers to determine if they wished to continue being represented by the unions. The informal vote was 69 to 23 *against* union representation.

The UFCW and the Teamsters appealed Sterling’s refusal to bargain over wages and benefits to the National Labor Relations Board. In 1983, an administrative law judge upheld the union’s case, mandating that Sterling make all workers whole, including those on leave status since 1981, for any “loss of pay or

other benefits they may have suffered as a result of the "unlawful implementation of new wages and other terms and conditions of employment on August 19, 1982."

The NLRB said that Sylvester's claim that a clear majority of workers had rejected the union was "tainted" by Sterling's unfair labor practices. The company was ordered to post a notice in the plant informing workers that it had violated the National Labor Relations Act and was now recognizing the unions and their right to engage in collective bargaining.

Back pay obligations totaled around $400,000. Sylvester asked Cargill to assume the liability. Cargill refused, announcing it was pulling out of the purchase.

Ernie Gregg, president of the Garrett County Board of Commissioners, wrote a letter to U.S. Rep. Beverly Byron (D-Md.- 6) advising that federal help could be "the last chance of preserving about 200 jobs that are critical to this community's economy."

Gregg told Byron he and fellow commissioners, John Braskey and Elwood Groves, saw great potential in keeping Cargill in the game to modernize the facility and "perhaps even [develop] a multi- million-dollar feed mill on the Chessie [Railroad] line near Oakland."

Gregg said workers in the plant were petitioning their unions to set aside the back pay settlement and the unions were "receptive" because they "belatedly realize that the local membership will lose their jobs if the order is enforced." No federal or state intervention came. In July 1983, the plant shut down. Sylvester blamed the unions for the idling of operations and the loss of jobs.

Sylvester's friends covered the political spectrum. They included Lowell Bender, the GCCAC leader who had visited Commissioner Hubert Friend in 1970, asking him to settle the roads workers' strike. Looking back on Sylvester and his plant, Bender said, "The unions drove Sterling Processing away."

Bender's summation appeared to be widely held. And decades after the shutdown, the town of Oakland was still benefiting from the water treatment plant Sylvester established.

Looking back on her father's career, Heidi Kern said, "There were two types of people in Oakland—those who saw the need for a factory that employed people who didn't require a lot of education to make their living—and others who didn't want people walking around town wearing smelly black boots."

She said her father "wasn't materialistic in any way" and envisioned himself looking after men and women others disdained or ignored.

Garrett Manufacturing Corp.

In 1969, Garrett Manufacturing Corp. opened a plant in Deer Park to make women's blouses. The plant was owned by Pennsylvanian Faust Capobianco and managed by Friendsville resident Oma Everly. The same year, the company recognized the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU).

Cinda Savage began work at the sewing factory about a month after it opened. "I made cuffs and collars and also top-stitched them," said Savage. "The work started in the back where I was and progressed to the front. At the top, the final pressing and hanging for shipment was done.

"There was an agreement in place with the owner when the factory first opened that, after six months, everyone would be in the union," she said. "There was no strike or fight to get the union [Local 334] in the shop," she added.

"If I am remembering correctly, there was a federal limit as to the number of hours women could work at that time. Because we had a union and it was factory work, the pay was pretty good for women working in Garrett County. We had paid holidays, a pension, vacation and health insurance was paid for by the company."

Savage studied the history of the ILGWU from the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire of 1911 and said she took pride in the union's advertising campaign, "Look for the Union Label." The factory expanded and, at peak operations, employed 100 employees working seven hours a day. A second shift of 20 high school students worked after school until 7:30 p.m.

Betty Elliott began working at Garrett Manufacturing in 1973 and served as vice president of Local 334. "I enjoyed working there. It wasn't easy, but I was a tough girl," said Elliott, who was raised on a farm in Red House. "You had to meet your quota or [the floor lady] was on you."

When she first began working in the shop, she and her co-workers competed with one another over the number of pieces they sewed, said Elliott, but most soon realized they weren't being properly compensated for their extra labor.

"You knew who to talk to on the job [about the union] and who not to talk to," said Elliott, recalling that some of her co-workers would report all union activity to the manager, Oma Everly.

Union meetings, said Elliott, were held at a lodge off Route 135 and at the nearby VFW hall. In 1990, the local struck the plant for increased wages. "We weren't out there very long, maybe one day," said Elliott.

Kitzmiller resident Helen Tasker worked on the “sides and hemming” of blouses, produced for customers including Sears, J.C. Penny and Montgomery Wards.

“The material came in [already] cut. If we ran short for a sleeve or one piece of the front of shirts, we would cut the whole shirt,” said Tasker, who had formerly worked for Sterling Processing.

In 1992 Garrett Manufacturing Co. shut down the Deer Park plant, idling members of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) and sending their work to a new facility in Mexico. The *Baltimore Sun* reported the plant’s workers could “never” have competed with the low wages paid the Mexican workers.

“Our hearts were dragging,” said Elliott, who helped convene meetings of ILGWU members to discuss how to survive the coming economic difficulties. After the plant shut down, Elliott declined federal training benefits for which she qualified, since the shutdown was precipitated by foreign competition. She went to work as a food service worker at Broadford Elementary School in Oakland.

At the time of the shutdown, Betty said her husband Delbert Elliott had a “good job” working at a Buffalo Coal Co. strip mine owned by the DelSignore family. They'd met in their teens, picking beans, kale, and spinach on Wayne Hamilton’s nearby farm.

“He had black lung [disease], but not real bad,” said Elliott, adding that her husband didn’t apply for black lung benefits because he didn’t want to anger the DelSignores.

Elliott’s pension from Garrett Manufacturing was $54.76 a month.

In Nov. 2022, Betty Elliott helped organize a reunion of her Garrett Manufacturing Co. co-workers at the Deer Park United Methodist Church. “I love the get-togethers," she said. "That’s the way I live."

“If you think having a union in the sewing factory solved all the problems we had as women, think again,” said Cinda Savage, who worked at the company until its closing. “While men who worked for years get great pensions, the most any of us get for working at the sewing factory is $90.00 a month.”

She said she was aware of “at least” two challenges by Garrett County women over employment discrimination: Cathy Lyon’s case with the Roads Department, and the case of a Ruth Enlow PublicLibrary employee who contended she should have been offered medical benefits equivalent to those of male employees.

Savage remembered a Garrett Manufacturing Co. co-worker who was suffering from cancer and was taking chemotherapy, but still came to work every day. “She was a hero,” said Savage in 2020. “That is how I view the men and women who got up every day regardless of how they felt and did whatever it took to take care of their families.”

She added, “Those [manufacturing] jobs are for the most part gone now. I can understand the anger that some feel today. All they want is to be able to have a decent job and not have to cobble together three or four part-time jobs to make a living."

Savage said, “The “big story is more than just the union strikes. It is [a] story of working class heroes.” Savage saw that the jobs were “going away” and began furthering her education. "When the factory closed, I was somewhat ready,” she said.

There were no job listings in the newspaper for women at the time. She said she was “blessed beyond belief,” to get a job with CPA Willetta Mateer, a close friend of Dottie Leighton, leader of the county’s League of Women Voters in the early 1970s. In 2025, Savage was still working for Mateer’s successor, accountant Brian Boal, as an administrative assistant.

Deer Park Water

More union members lost jobs in 1993 after Perrier Corp. of America, a division of Nestle, purchased Deer Park Water from Clorox. The original operation was launched by the B&O Railroad to provide bottles of water to refresh its passengers and visitors to the company’s Deer Park Hotel complex.

Nestle shut down the subsidiary’s water bottling plant in Oakland and began filling tanker trucks, sending the water to Pennsylvania for bottling.

Bausch and Lomb

In 1996, Bausch and Lomb shut down production in Garrett County and consolidated its sunglass manufacturing in San Antonio, Texas. Even after twice rejecting Teamster union representation, the company’s workers in Garrett County earned an average of $9.44 per hour compared to their successors’ $7 per hour in Texas.

The *Baltimore Sun* reported: “Cheap Southern labor is still a potent lure to industry, that even the best work force sometimes isn’t good enough…

Manufacturers' concerns go far beyond the taxes and regulations that state leaders are now focusing on [to address the shutdown]."

When major manufacturers close shop in the nation's urban centers, local newspapers carry long articles about the effect of the shutdown on workers, their families, and the wider community. In thinly settled Garrett County, there was no need for *The Republican* to endlessly chronicle the painful shutdowns. The pain was everywhere, and everyone knew someone who was affected.

Duane Yoder said the only county event in his memory comparable to the roads strike in its impact on the community's workers was the shutdown of Bausch and Lomb.

Clayburn Refractories

Clayburn Refractories in Jennings, formerly Harbison-Walker, shut down in 2014 putting members of the United Steelworkers (formerly District 50 of the Mineworkers) out of work.

Verso (Formerly Westvaco)

Verso shut down its Luke, Md. paper mill (formerly Westvaco) in 2019, permanently idling 675 employees, including members of the United Steelworkers, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, and the facility's managers.

Verso's iconic Luke mill produced coated, glossy paper. The market for the product had long been crippled by online publishing and foreign competition. In May 2019, paper mill workers who lacked the seniority and age to retire crowded into a job fair in Luke. Several local manufacturers set up tables at the fair, many offering jobs that paid less than half the average wage in the mill.

The mill's stench, the oft-repeated unwanted "smell of jobs" could waft 40 miles into Garrett County. The shutdown indirectly eliminated 2,000 additional jobs in the region, including loggers, most of them Garrett County residents, who supplied pulpwood to the mill and small businesses in the area.

Many of the loggers had more than $1 million invested in equipment. They were small business people with big bills coming due. New paper mill customers were located hours away, trips that would burn up more gasoline and put more wear and tear on their trucks than they could afford. When dozens of loggers met at Garrett College directly after the shutdown, it was clear some would painfully

leave the business and the tradition, the logging boots, and the Marlboro Man swagger behind.

Logan Kitzmiller tried to ward off the blame game that accompanied many plant shutdowns. But long before the Verso shutdown, the losses of PPG's glass and Kelly-Springfield's tire plants in Allegany County had taken their toll, not just on the local unions, but on the reputation of leaders who had devoted years to bettering the pay and working conditions of their peers.

"My dad wasn't real popular around Cumberland [after PPG and some of the other big plants shut down]," said Billy Lindner, son of Michael Lindner, the Cumberland native and AFSCME staffer who organized Garrett County's roads workers. "People said the unions shut the plants down."

Mylan Pharmaceutical Co. (Morgantown, WV.)

In July 2021, Mylan Pharmaceuticals shut down its Morgantown plant, which had opened in 1965. Garrett County residents were among nearly 850 members of United Steelworkers Local 8-957 and 550 non-union employees who lost their jobs.

Founded in 1961 by Milan "Mike" Puskar, the son of Serbian immigrants, Mylan grew into the third largest pharmaceutical company in the U.S., manufacturing oral solid dose medications, including penicillin and tetracycline.

Puskar, a generous philanthropist, enjoyed a constructive relationship with the Steelworkers until his retirement in 2009. Things went downhill quickly after Puskar's departure. Mylan's CEO, Heather Bresch, the daughter of then-U.S. Senator Joe Manchin, made the news by slashing worker benefits and even barring Puskar from visiting the plant.

In 2020, Mylan completed a merger with Pfizer's Upjohn unit to form Viatris Inc. The Upjohn holdings include pharmaceutical operations in India and China. The shutdown of the Morgantown plant, amid the COVID 19 pandemic, was part of a $1 billion cost-cutting campaign by the new company. Local union representatives said they expected production from Morgantown to be shifted to overseas plants.

ClosetMaid

In 2023, ClosetMaid, a producer of shelving and closet products, located in a Grantsville industrial park, shut down, leaving 170 workers without jobs. The

company had been purchased in 2017 by Griffin Corp., based in New York. Production in the facility, the company's largest, was moved overseas.

HunterDouglas

In 2023, HunterDouglas, a producer of window blinds and coverings, in nearby Cumberland, Md. shut down, stranding 800 workers.

Today's Garrett County Workforce

The pain of the plant shutdowns may recede. Remembrances will fade like those of a family's most notorious ancestors. The loss of good industrial jobs will continue to be silently bound with the daily struggle and grind of many workers in Garrett County—population 28,856—to come out of the state's economic wilderness.

- In 2024, the average weekly wage in Garrett County was $914.00, compared to Maryland's average of $1,177.
- Garrett County's median household income was $64,947, compared to Maryland's median of $98,461.
- Garrett County's poverty rate in 2024 was 11%.
- In 2023, 32.6 percent of county residents received Medicaid.
- In 2024, 25% of county residents were eligible for Medicare.
- ·Garrett County is aging faster than the state's population, with 34.6 percent of the county's population aged 65 years or older.

The county's largest industry is health care and social assistance, followed by construction, then retail. The overwhelming share of in-county construction and the entire retail sector is non-union. By 2021, only eight major Garrett County manufacturers remained, employing a total of about 800 workers.

The county's manufacturers are all non-union. They include Beitzel Industries (mining construction, engineering, with facilities in West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, and New Mexico); Pillar Innovations (mine support); Phenix Technologies (high-voltage testing equipment), Garrett Containers (government contractor) and Demaree Inflatable Boats.

The only underground mine remaining in Maryland is Corsa Coal Co.'s Casselman Mine, located two miles south of Grantsville. The non-union mine, employing 130 workers, produces metallurgical coal for the steel industry.

Corsa, based in Friedens, Pa. in nearby Somerset County, declared Chapter 11 bankruptcy in January, 2025, with the mine continuing to run during corporate reorganization.

Corsa Coal Co's annual information form (March 3, 2021) discussed unionization:

"Coal mining is a labor-intensive industry. From time to time, Corsa may encounter a shortage of experienced mine workers. In addition, the employees of Corsa may choose to unionize, which may disrupt operations on account of contract negotiations, grievances, arbitrations, strikes, lockouts or other work stoppages or actions. As a result, Corsa may be forced to substantially increase labor costs to remain competitive in terms of attracting and retaining skilled laborers."

All employees at the county's largest employer, Garrett Regional Medical Center, part of the West Virginia University Medical System, are unorganized. Laborer's Local 814 represents nine hundred workers at WVU Medical System's Ruby Memorial Hospital in nearby Morgantown, W.V., including dietary, transport and laundry personnel, but none in Garrett County.

Employers of unorganized workplaces exert significant political influence in the county. Phenix Technologies, with dealings in 110 countries, and Pillar Innovations, a subsidiary of Beitzel Inc., are active sponsors of STEM programs in the public schools.

Don Morin, former CEO of Garrett Containers, one of the kayakers who arrived in Friendsville in the 1970s, a staunch Republican, is chairman of the board of trustees of Garrett College, whose members are appointed by the governor of Maryland.

Garrett Containers produces reusable aluminum shipping containers for use as military dog kennels, small arms storage and welded airtight containers for hazmat substances among others. In 2022, the company was acquired by Albers Aerospace, based in McKinney, Texas.

Frank Vitez, former president of Phenix Technologies, the son of roads striker James Vitez, said no union ever tried to organize his company, which was acquired by ESCO Technologies of St. Louis in August 2021. Vitez, who first entered the market for high-voltage testing equipment in 1975, said he took pride in the

wages he paid to his employees in comparison to the lower-paid average incomes of workers in the tourism sector.

Economic Development

As of this writing, Garrett County's economic development officials report that several new employers are planning or considering moves into the county's industrial parks.

Recruitment of new businesses is nearly as widely discussed across the county as the lack of affordable housing that makes workforce retention a challenge for existing employers.

While the county seeks to fill vacant slots in its industrial parks, some towns are focused on attracting small retail manufacturers. Valerie Stemac, who was appointed business manager of Oakland in 2024, says, "I don't want to see factories in Oakland." She says Oakland's proximity to parks, recreation and a four-season resort should be leveraged to attract young entrepreneurs, like those in places like Rockland, Me., who include small-scale crafts makers/retailers and tech innovators.

Union Members in Garrett County

Despite the county's anti-union stereotype, thousands of Garrett County's residents encounter union members daily. The Garrett County Teacher's Association (GCTA) represents educators and is part of the Maryland State Teachers Assoc. (NEA).

Nearly two-dozen members of the GCTA traveled to Annapolis in 2019 to join teachers across Maryland lobbying for more support for public education and educators. Garrett County teachers supported their peers in West Virginia during teacher strikes the same year. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) continues to represent cafeteria and janitorial managers, formerly members of the Maryland Classified Employees Association.

Dave Beard, former president of the American Federation of Teachers, remained active in several local fraternal organizations. Lynne Elmlinger, former president of the Garrett County Teachers Association, stayed engaged, along with other members of her family, in all aspects of production at Our Town Theatre.

Workers with the United States Postal Service belong to the American Postal Workers Union (APWU). Their local union is based in Cumberland. Rural letter carriers belong to the National Rural Letter Carriers Association.

Technicians and repair personnel at Verizon belong to the Communications Workers of America (CWA).

The Utility Workers Union of America (UWUA) Local 419 represents workers at Columbia Gas. Another UWUA local represents workers at Potomac Edison. Columbia Gas assigns 24 employees to Allegany County and only one full-time in Garrett County.

Rick Selders, a longtime Garrett County resident and former treasurer of the Garrett County Democratic Club, is the sole Columbia Gas employee assigned to Garrett County.

"I think without unions, there would not be the safety and training programs in place," said Selders, adding "Unions don't get the credit for those programs."

"It baffles me why there hasn't been a union movement in this area," said Selders. "I think we need one now more than ever… before the middle class has completely vanished. How do we convince people to stop voting against their own interests? Can you imagine [how wages and benefits would rise across the county] if some of the larger employers, like Beitzel Industries, Pillar Innovations, and the hospital were union?"

Garrett County residents are part of the 2,000-member workforce at Allegany Ballistics Laboratory in nearby Rocket Center, W.Va. The facility, managed by Northrop Grumman, opened in 1944. It is the largest defense manufacturer in the state, producing 80 different military products. International Chemical Workers Union-UFCWU Local 261-C represents 746 members in all categories of work at Allegany Ballistics, managed by Northrop Grumman.

Mt. Savage Firebrick Co., in a small Allegany County village close to the Garrett County line, has been producing refractory brick since 1837. The small workforce, organized by the United Steelworkers, is only employed four months out of the year due to reduced demand from steel mills and other industries requiring furnace brick.

The longest-standing manufacturer in Garrett County was still a union shop and operating in 2021. Feccheimer, the successor of Flushing Shirt Co., established in Grantsville in 1953, manufactures tactical uniforms for the military and police under the well-known label, "Flying Cross." The label was founded in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1842. The company continues to produce uniforms in plants in Cincinnati

and Hodgenville, Ky. and runs other plants in Central and South America, Europe, Africa, and Asia.

The workforce at Feccheimer, a subsidiary of billionaire Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway, is represented by Workers United, an affiliate of the Service Employees International Union and successor of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. Nathaniel Hall, a Workers United staffer, formerly serviced the plant's local in 2020, "We [union and company] had a great relationship. If there was a problem, we sat down and talked about it," he said.

Hall, who is Black, said it took a while to establish relationships with the all-white, mostly female workforce. But, after a while, he said, "They were inviting me to dinner or to go hunting."

More troubling to Hall was Garrett County union members advising him, if he planned to stay overnight, to get a motel room closer to Cumberland where there was more racial diversity.

Union building and construction trades, based mostly in Allegany County, employ many Garrett County residents. Union members and leaders play an active role in many county communities. Rob Reckart, an organizer for the United Brotherhood of Carpenters, serves as the mayor of Kitzmiller. Tim Galica, a retired member of the United Transportation Union (UTU) at Chessie System, directed the Avilton Community Center for many years.

Retired professor Mary Helen Spear, a former member of the National Educational Association at Prince George's [Md.] Community College, has been active in the Victoria Chatauqua commemorations in Mountain Lake Park and researching and celebrating the movement for women's suffrage in Garrett County.

Michael Bello, a retired president of Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 2107 in Annapolis served on the board of directors of Mount Laurel Medical Center. Patrick Hunt, a Vietnam veteran and retired CWA research staffer, served on the local Democratic Central Committee and was a presidential elector in 2020.

More union retirees, mostly from Pennsylvania and other Maryland counties, have resettled in Garrett County, engaging in a wide range of community activities.

Housing for Working Families

“Where else can you find farmland for $100 an acre or a 22-room Deer Park Mansion on three acres for $9,000?” That was the question on the front page of the *Baltimore Sun*’s real estate section on March 7, 1971.

The *Sun* reported that an influx of buyers, many between ages 25 and 35, with incomes of $15,000 to $30,000 a year and savings to invest in property were arriving in Garrett County from Washington and Baltimore. They were snatching up second-homes from long-time county vacationers from Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania.

“Garrett County is one of the last places left where the $1,500 lot is alive and kicking,” wrote the *Sun,* warning that the attractiveness of lakefront property was marred by the lack of a building code or zoning plan. “Housekeeping has been rather untidy. There are mobile homes next door to $40,000 property. An abandoned drive-in theatre [decays] in a beautiful valley. There are carcasses of cars all over the place.”

Even before modern sewer systems were installed, further increasing residential density around the lake, the four-season resort area was already seeing the “explosive growth” some county leaders like Ross Sines had predicted. Five decades later, sales of homes surrounding Deep Creek Lake were booming in value, second only to Montgomery County in 2021.

The mobile homes referenced in the *Sun* are now mostly located far away from the commercial center, many in extreme disrepair, alongside a severely diminished inventory of single-family homes that working families with average incomes can afford.

The county commissioners continue to outsource responsibility for low-income housing and maintaining the county’s social safety net for the working poor to the GCCAC. The GCCAC’s staff of 182 works to meet the needs of county citizens facing difficult economic and family circumstances.

The GCCAC manages all the county’s senior centers and its public transportation. And the agency has overseen the funding and building of numerous public housing developments. One county commissioner has always served as an ex officio member of the board at GCCAC, following the practice in the pre-strike era when a commissioner sat on the local Welfare Board.

Local elected officials thus derive credit from initiatives, financed in large part by federal programs tapped by GCCAC, some of the same programs the Republican Party leaders have historically criticized.

GCCAC’s former leader, Duane Yoder, cited the controversy over Bradley Manor, a low-income public housing development completed in 1971, as an

instructive barometer of the county's approach to federal and state intervention and public housing. The battle over Bradley Manor's disrepair—and how to address the problem of affordable housing in Garrett County—drew in administrators, planners, elected leaders, and business interests across the county.

Built by Baltimore developer Morton Sarubin, Bradley Manor's Oakland townhomes were constructed in a meadow across from Sterling Processing in Oakland. The complex was already falling to decay ten years after its opening, due mostly to shoddy construction.

Flat roofs topped the complex's 100 modular townhomes, manufactured by Boise Cascade. They were poor protection against the county's heavy snows. Leaks began to rot walls in the units below, exposing 2x4 studding. With no suitable outside drainage, foundations were deteriorating, and electrical wiring was exposed. Toilets weren't functioning. Snow plowing services were unavailable.

Sarubin built a legacy of delinquent taxes and failure to maintain properties for which he received HUD subsidies. Nevertheless, he was declaring tax losses on his public housing developments of $50,000 to $100,000 a year.

The decrepit condition of Sarubin's properties was frequently covered in the *Baltimore Sun*, which reported from Garrett County with numerous articles from the early 70s until 1995 when the complex was demolished.

"Living there [Bradley Manor] was like not living at all," Bunny Tranum, a former Sterling worker, told the *Sun*.

She and her husband, Charles Tranum, a retired coal miner from Kitzmiller, formed the Bradley Manor Tenant Club. They and their fellow tenants—retirees, active workers, and social services recipients—made 10-hour round trips to Baltimore to plead with HUD officials to address Sarubin's neglect of his properties.

In 1977, the Tranums and others attempted to organize a rent strike. They told the *Sun* the protest was deterred by fellow residents who were afraid of being evicted. Sarubin, they added, told residents, "If you don't like the place, I can take the houses out on trucks the same way I brought them in."

Many units ended up abandoned in the complex, where only a portion of tenants qualified for subsidies requiring income of less than $10,000 a year for a family of four.

Tim Dugan, the county's planner, said 15 to 20 percent of Oakland's population lived in Bradley Manor. "I have two continuing nightmares," Dugan told

The *Sun*: “What happens if ceilings fall in on these people, and what happens if they’re evicted with no place to go?”

Discussions over Bradley Manor, said Yoder, made their way to the White House as U.S. Rep. Beverly Byron (D-Md. 6th District) lobbied President Ronald Reagan—who was initiating major cuts in Section 8 housing subsidies—to rescue Garrett County’s public housing. A conservative Democrat, Byron had been elected to Congress in 1978 after the passing of her husband, U.S. Rep. Goodloe Byron. Yoder said Byron had at least three discussions with Reagan about Bradley Manor after his election in 1981.

In 1982, climaxing years of complaints by tenants and their supporters and bitter wrangling with Sarubin, the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) foreclosed on the developer and took over management of Bradley Manor. HUD offered Oakland and Garrett County $5.8 million to rebuild or relocate the units under the condition they form a public housing authority.

Oakland Mayor Hub Swartzentruber opposed the establishment of a housing authority. In a 4-3 vote, the Oakland City Council agreed. Councilman Smokey Stanton, who had supported the building of affordable housing in Oakland, voted with the majority. He and others contended that HUD was constantly shifting deadlines. Oakland attorney Tom Dabney said there was a fear that the housing authority would be “just another political football.”

Oakland City Council members were under pressure from residents like radio station manager Tom Butscher, who led the opposition to Bradley Manor in 1971. Council members advised that the city would work with a private housing developer, but that a housing authority should be established at the county level. The *Sun* quoted Maurice Brookhart, a leading county Democrat, who attended the council meeting: “Let the place [Bradley Manor] fall down and revert back to HUD.”

With Oakland refusing to move forward, Garrett County’s board of commissioners established the housing authority, electing Dale Harvey, a local building contractor, to a 5-year term as chairman. The commission immediately looked for an architect to design a public housing development on a 44-acre site between Mt. Lake Park and Oakland. Since the development was planned for an area outside of an incorporated municipality, the hope was it would be less vulnerable to neighborhood opposition.

The public housing plans were stillborn. In 1982, a freshly elected board of commissioners, composed of Republicans Ernie Gregg and Ellwood Groves and

Democrat John Braskey, reversed their predecessor's support, and decommissioned the housing authority.

In a February 1983 story in the *Sun*, Braskey explained his opposition: "Ten years from now, will HUD have the money or will it [public housing] fall on the county's responsibility?"

Responding to Braskey, Dale Harvey, the short-lived chair of the housing commission, said, "Someone has an obligation to these people in Bradley Manor and for other poor people in the county." He contended that any contract with HUD would preclude the local government being responsible for maintaining the development.

The new commissioners drew an uncharacteristically angry response from Yoder when they claimed on February 9, 1983: "Unsanitary and unsafe inhabited dwelling accommodations do not now exist in Garrett County and there is not a shortage of safe and sanitary dwellings for families of low income at rentals they can afford."

"It's absolutely false that more rental property is available than five months ago," said Yoder. He told commissioners GCCAC had conducted a 13-month survey of available rental homes and found that poor families would have to pay 70% of their incomes to live in the decent homes available.

"It was very embarrassing to tell Rep. Byron that the county had changed its position," said Yoder. To resolve the issue, the federal government sent the funds that had been destined for the county housing authority to the GCCAC in the form of vouchers to create suitable units to house low-income residents.

Yoder and GCCAC became the county's de facto housing authority. Even while federal government grants were being tapped to build decent, affordable housing for their neighbors, many of the county's leading politicians continued to echo President Ronald Reagan, contending that "As government expands, liberty contracts."

Bradley Manor was demolished in 1995. GCCAC received funding from the Appalachian Regional Commission and other sources, totaling $4.4 million to build 32 townhomes and 32 garden apartments on the site. The GCCAC responsibly managed the county's public housing properties and increased the number of units.

Bradley Manor "soured the community, writ large, on public housing," said Smokey Stanton. But GCCAC and its partners found an ally in Leo Martin, the former mayor of Mountain Lake Park.

"Leo wanted Mountain Lake to be the biggest incorporated town in the county so he could maximize revenue-sharing [grants]," said Stanton. New, well-constructed and maintained subsidized housing developments were built on the outskirts of the town. The developments "flew under the radar," said Stanton.

Today, demand is exceeding supply and the challenge of affordable housing in Garrett County has only intensified in the years since the Bradley Manor fight.

In their comprehensive plan of 1974, Tim Dugan and Garrett County planners had identified the lack of affordable housing for workers with average incomes as a pressing challenge.

Successive comprehensive plans restated the need. Planners suggested that local employers help find solutions to the housing challenge, since the lack of close-by affordable residences undermined the ability to attract new businesses and lift the economy.

As of 2025, there was widespread recognition that rising housing values, particularly in the Lake District, and the low inventory of affordable housing had reached crisis proportions.

Rising construction costs, driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, compounded the problem. What was the incentive for contractors to build medium-priced homes when high-dollar residences, mostly second homes, around Deep Creek Lake were skyrocketing in value? Potential customers were also eager to renovate existing homes.

A successful first-time homebuyer's program managed by GCCAC and supported by the local real estate and banking sectors had offered mortgage assistance to dozens of qualified buyers. "The first-time home-buyers program was the most popular I have ever seen," said Paul Edwards, chairman of the county's board of commissioners. "I didn't hear any complaints from critics on either side [left or the right]."

Predictions of widespread defaults among working families helped by the program were greatly exaggerated, with only a few aid recipients unable to maintain their mortgages. Despite the program's success, the county commissioners suspended the program in the wake of COVID 19.

Complicating any initiative to address affordable housing in the future are the same attitudes that led the county and Oakland to reject federal help to replace Bradley Manor. In 2019, Kate Smith, born in New Jersey and transplanted from North Carolina, was elected to the Oakland city council. She was the first Black resident to serve in any political office in the county. Smith, who chose not to run

for re-election in 2021, lived in The Glades, a subsidized housing development on the site of the former Bradley Manor.

One of the council members called her neighbors, “Section 8 scum,” said Smith. “There are people here who work two or three jobs and still need food assistance and affordable housing,” said Smith, who, in 2020 began organizing a Garrett County chapter of the NAACP.

Many local employers have largely ignored the suggestion in several county comprehensive plans to get involved in helping finance affordable housing. But Brenda McDonnell, a local restaurateur, has provided low-cost housing for her employees in cabins built by her husband’s family, the former owners of Wisp resort. Other employers have rented units to their employees.

Wisp’s Western Maryland owners filed for bankruptcy in 2011. The ski resort was purchased one year later by Salt Lake City-based Pacific Group Resorts. Wisp houses some seasonal employees, many on work visas from Europe and South America, in some of the company’s rental units.

In October 2021, this writer and other residents launched an online petition drive calling on the county’s board of commissioners to raise the real estate transfer tax by one percent for properties valued at more than $500,000. The petition demanded that revenues from the tax increase be invested in building workforce housing and helping first-time homebuyers and renters of average income. Many young residents across the political spectrum who worked in the tourism and service sectors for low pay joined the petition campaign.

The next year, a well-attended town hall meeting on workforce housing was held at Garrett College, bringing political and business leaders together with residents directly affected by the housing shortage. The meeting was called by the fledgling Garrett Workforce Housing Alliance.

The attention brought to the issue resulted in the commissioners significantly increasing funds in the county’s first-time homebuyers program. The county also moved forward on a long-discussed plan to build a housing development in Grantsville, working with GCCAC and the Garrett Development Corporation to establish a land trust. As of 2025, no homes have been built and the development’s nomenclature has been changed from “workforce” housing to “attainable” housing. The target residential population, say county leaders, will be working families above the county’s median income who will be moving from “starter” homes to a larger residences.

The campaign for an increase in the transfer tax and accommodations tax to benefit working families continued into 2025, with activists raising the threshold

for increasing the transfer tax to $1,000,000. Both measures would require state approval.

In December, after the election of President Donald Trump, the county's Annapolis delegation addressed the county commissioners, cautioning that the new administration's plans to drastically reduce federal jobs and move federal agencies out of Maryland could further undermine the state's economy, reverberating to the county budget.

Despite their warnings of hard times to come, the county commissioners refused to ask the delegation to introduce legislation to increase tax revenues on real estate sales and tourist rentals.They said the county budget "looks good for a couple years."

A retired county real estate agent, who conducted sales across the property spectrum, said, in 2021, "The problem of affordable housing is still, fundamentally, a problem of low wages." But, even if the median wage was raised to the state's level, there would still be a deep lack of affordable inventory.

State or federal programs to incentivize the building of more affordable housing could be reduced along with other pieces of the social safety net. At the time of this writing, Republicans in Congress are proposing major cuts to Medicare and other programs that are critical to supporting local medical centers and nursing homes. While the partisan allegiances of county residents have held strong, the cuts could, nevertheless, encourage more civic engagement opposing the party's budget priorities.

In January 2025, Garrett Transit Service (GTS), funded through federal grants passed through to GCCAC, announced that it was cutting out-of-county services. The rides were widely used by seniors to visit doctors at WVU's medical campus in Morgantown. The cuts were the result of the termination of funds that were enhanced during the COVID pandemic.

Local residents and service providers showed up at a public meeting, outlining the deep impact of the cuts on those who rely upon GTS. The meeting received front-page coverage in *The Republican*. The county commissioners quickly voted to fill the shortfall of federal funding and continue out-of-county service.

GCCAC's programs are widely respected. And, with its staff of 180, the provider is one of the county's largest employers. Chris Mullett, who replaced Duane Yoder as president in 2023, says he is deeply concerned about signals from the current administration dealing with the social safety net. Those concerns could test some of the county's political assumptions. When the Trump

administration paused funding for Head Start, Mullett called together 80 employees to tell them they could be furloughed or lose their jobs. “It was one of the worst days of my life,” said Mullett. Some of the staff members were crying. The vast majority, he surmised, voted for Donald Trump.

The county’s Chamber of Commerce has maintained a bi-partisan consensus in opposition to raising the state’s minimum wage to $15 an hour, contending that the short season for retail businesses requires a “carve out” from mandates that are reasonable in other counties. No union campaigns appear to be on the immediate horizon in the county.

George Orwell, the author of *1984* wrote: “Progress is not an illusion; it happens, but it is slow and invariably disappointing.”

Five decades after their predecessors captured national attention fighting for a union, many of today’s young Garrett County roads workers are facing adversities similar to their unorganized predecessors in finding suitable housing and a path to economic security.

The struggle continues.

Today’s Roads Workers

Workers at the county garages have a lot to say about the erosion of the respect their predecessors enjoyed from county leaders and residents. But some are afraid to place their names on the record for fear of retaliation.

Several years back, Jay Moyer, former chief roads engineer, later director of public works, met with a group of newly hired road workers who had not yet completed their probationary periods.

“They put a paper in front of us showing us what we would pay in union dues out of our paychecks every month over 30 years,” said one of the workers who was in the meeting. “They told us how much we could make if, *instead* of joining the union, we put the money in an investment account.”

“We [new hires] talked amongst ourselves [after the meeting]. One buddy of mine said, ‘If they want us not to join the union this bad, we should join.”

The new hires had just been handed the same paternalistic, anti-union rhetoric Ross Sines had expressed in a county commission meeting 43 years earlier, when he said paying union dues would “[reduce] the amount for workers to spend.”

Managers’ efforts to weaken the union have had mixed success. Attempts to discourage union membership largely failed in the Oakland and Grantsville

garages, where in 2022, union membership was nearly 100 percent. By contrast, less than half of the workers who report to the Accident garage belonged to the union in 2024.

Like any organization, a local union is only as strong as its weakest link. Local 1834's leaders say a now-retired senior worker at the Accident garage, who never signed a union card, had convinced many younger workers not to join. Despite the opposition, total union membership in 2024 still numbered 62 out of 89 eligible members working in all three garages.

The local's union density was substantial, considering Garrett County's historical opposition to state-sanctioned collective bargaining rights. And even in AFSCME's strongest areas where the union maintained "agency" shops, organized labor's clout had been severely weakened.

In 2018, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Janus v. AFSCME* that public sector unions could no longer compel non-members to pay a servicing fee to the union for collective bargaining and representation.

The decision undermined the morale of union members across the public sector. In Garrett County, the roads department had always been an "open shop." AFSCME was faced with the predicament of workers who said they don't want to keep paying dues to a union that "negotiates lousy contracts." But, with fewer members under the union umbrella than after the local's formation, there is even *less* leverage to protect workers—both from the penny-pinching of municipalities and attacks in state or national legislatures.

Today's road workers are concerned about eroding health care insurance coverage. Local 1834 had won guaranteed full insurance benefits for retirees who had completed 26 years of service. Their spouses would be covered by 50 percent after union members completed 30 years of service. The county terminated spousal retiree coverage and co-pays have escalated.

Members and leaders cite numerous challenges that are testing the union's mettle, unity, and morale. The local's 2020 contract included longevity raises. The most senior workers won raises of $1 per hour. Workers on the next rung down received $.50 per hour.

The introduction of tiered increases was contentious. Some members argued that the increases would be divisive. Road workers had always been paid the same rates for performing the same work. It was part of their union legacy.

The longevity proposal had followed a prior agreement between AFSCME and the commissioners that enabled the county to hire up to 10 workers out of the workforce of 89 as "contractual" employees.

The “contractuals” could be forced to wait up to three years before being permanently hired by the roads department. They were entitled to medical benefits, but they received lower hourly pay than their longer service peers, starting at $15 per hour, and they accrued no personal leave, holidays, or retirement benefits.

“I pushed for $17.50 for [the contractual] starting pay,” said one Local 1834 member, who argued that anything lower would result in turnover on jobs requiring outside work in challenging weather. His prediction was confirmed.

The high quit rate of skilled contract employees who left the roads department looking for permanent jobs forced the county to bring most of the non-permanent hires still on the roads into full-time jobs with full benefits.

Local 1834 Executive Board member Clyde “Junior” DeWitt whose grandfather began working on the county roads in the 1950s, opposed the longevity bonuses but couldn’t attend the meeting.

“If we had turned down the contract [longevity bonuses],” he said, *everyone* would have received a two percent, across-the-board increase.”

In 2023, members elected three new leaders in Local 1834. The local election followed an internal AFSCME reorganization where the local was placed under the direction of AFSCME Council 3, in place of the former Council 67, both based in Baltimore.

Council president Patrick Moran said: “Our unified council is focused on supporting the work of our locals, whether that’s bargaining strong contracts or training union stewards.”

The new leaders, Brian Marsh, Brian Glass and Myles Perron, all began their careers on the roads as “contractual” employees and worked at least one year before being hired as permanent employees, entering the pipeline to achieve full-time pay and benefits. Marsh, was elected president, replacing Bill Miller, the longstanding president and 47-year employee, who stepped back to the vice presidency.

Before his hiring on the roads in 2017, Marsh worked as a guard at North Branch Correctional Institution in Allegany County, a maximum-security federal prison. Marsh said he was more willing to get active in the local union after seeing a “whole lot more communication, membership involvement and training” coming from Council 3.

Joining Marsh on the executive board was Brian Glass, 55, who had worked at Verso’s Luke, Md. paper mill for 27 years. Workers elected Myles Perron as shop

steward. Perron, 27, a U.S. Army veteran, had worked for Beitzel Industries as an excavator.

Council 3 has provided Glass and Perron with shop steward training. They and Marsh expressed renewed interest in enhancing the local's reputation, including strengthening the yearly scholarship raffle for graduating high school seniors.

Since the mid-2000s, the union local has organized fundraisers to provide scholarships to local students to help with books and supplies. In 2020, a dinner and a raffle helped raise enough money to provide 11 scholarships.

While interrupted by COVID, the scholarship program provided four $500 scholarships in 2024 to graduates from both local high schools. And the local elicited positive coverage in *The Republican*.

Senior roads workers expressed the hope that new leaders will help to reinvigorate the local union to protect and extend their gains since the roads strike. "We've come a long way in wastes and benefits," said Bill Miller, recalling a long-ago discussion with a local politician.

After Miller said his low pay qualified his children for free and reduced lunches, the local politician remarked, "Your wife should get a job." Miller also contrasted the stability of the roads department with the still unorganized Garrett County Utility Department, where turnover and job dissatisfaction remain high.

Strengthening the local's leverage and reputation and winning better contracts financed by taxpayer dollars could benefit from the lessons of 1970. Full-page ads in *The Republican* spoke directly to many residents' negative perceptions of unions. The ads underscored that it was *neighbors* and *relatives* who led Local 1834, not strangers from afar.

AFSCME honed a message that resonated in a county where individualism and anti-government ideology still runs deep, compromising on the question of an "agency" shop.

The union emphatically insisted that no worker would be forced to join the union, calling the decision their "FREE" choice, in capital letters, countering county commissioners who branded the union a coercive "third party." AFSCME promoted a more level playing field for *all* working people and reasonable treatment by supervisors and political leaders.

"Unions need to remember why the public responded so well to its communications in the first place," said Matt Bates, the former tool and die mechanic, member of the Machinists union and professor at Trinity Washington University.

"The union message is a breath of fresh air. Union values differ so sharply from the tired pro-business mantras we hear every day: that low taxes and small government are somehow the answer to everything, that 'me-first,' dog-eat-dog competition somehow produces a healthy, civilized society."

For many years after the strike settlement, Local 1834 hosted candidates' nights during municipal election campaigns, encouraging candidates to define their political agendas. Local wisdom held AFSCME's recommendation to be one of the keys to winning elections, alongside the endorsement of the county's sheriff's department and the Garrett County Farm Bureau.

Road workers remain in communities across the county's broad expanse. Their outreach and influence can be rebuilt. But Local 1834 has not held a candidates' night in many years, weakening its political clout.

Matt Bates said, "In the face of political polarization across the nation, AFSCME and other unions can offer real solutions to many of the biggest problems facing Garrett County and the rest of the country: the loss of good jobs; poverty-level pay and benefits, and cuts in education, housing, and other vital services. Unions don't make excuses for these problems or try to cover them up. They offer answers."

AFSCME Local 1834 and other Garrett County locals could gain greater respect and energize their members by paying attention to these needs and pursuing solutions. Once again, history can give insight.

In 1948, Garrett County union members were part of the Cumberland-based Western Maryland Labor Unity Conference, an amalgamation of local union affiliates that pre-dated the 1955 founding of the AFL-CIO. After landlords raised rents in Cumberland, the Labor Unity Conference lobbied for rent control in Allegany County. Western Maryland's unions were political kingmakers in those days and into the 1970s, organizing members to get out and vote, elevating friends to political office and taking down adversaries.

The labor movement's demographics have radically changed since, with women and people of color leading courageous struggles. Local 1834 could both gain and render support by building a closer relationship with the Garrett County Teachers Association, where members of the predominantly female workforce have shown their willingness to go to Annapolis and challenge state policymakers.

Garrett County's roads workers' pride in their jobs, like the self-respect of teachers and other union workers, hasn't waned. "Sometimes when folks drive by [roads workers] it looks like we're not working because we're waiting for materials or equipment. But people [take for granted] the good work we do when the ice

comes out of the east and we're plowing the roads, 24-7," said a 12-year union member.

Added Junior DeWitt: "The bridge crew out of Accident does an excellent job and we do all our own paving. This work is contracted out in other counties." Said DeWittt. "I'm a grader operator, but I may end up driving a truck or a snowplow. We don't have the strict [jurisdictional boundaries] that exist elsewhere. On the county roads, everybody works together to get the job done."

Nothing comes easy to municipal or private sector workers in low-wage counties with few unions. But perhaps the well-attended June 2021 unveiling of the road sign commemorating the 1970 strike, erected by the Maryland Historical Trust, is a sign that union organizing will stage a comeback. There is still a reserve of community support for today's road crews and other workers campaigning for union representation. May that support strengthen and enrich the lives of all Garrett County residents.