Catoctin Clarion

The *Catoctin Clarion* [LCCN: sn2016271043] took its name from the Catoctin Mountain ridge located west of Mechanicstown in Frederick County, Maryland. Mechanicstown had an industrial flavor at the time of the newspaper’s founding in 1871. The nearby Catoctin Iron Works had a long history dating to the 18th century, and the town’s first resident, Jacob Weller, established iron tool manufacturing and a friction match works that employed large numbers of skilled laborers, or mechanics. Tanneries and woolen mills also flourished in Mechanicstown.

The *Clarion* was founded by William Need who stated in the inaugural issue of March 4, 1871 his intent to establish an independent newspaper that would serve the interests of citizens in the northern part of Frederick County. His new enterprise was timely, as it coincided with the arrival in 1871 of the Western Maryland Rail Road, which helped connect goods manufactured in Mechanicstown to larger markets. Although politically unaffiliated, Need’s editorial position supported Horace Greeley’s candidacy in the 1872 presidential election. Ill health forced William Need to sell the *Clarion* in 1875 to Alexander P. Beatty, a young printer from Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Beatty in turn gave way to Edgar L. Root and Charles E. Cassell in 1879. Cassel, who served as the editor in the partnership, was a native of nearby Carroll County, Maryland and a Dickinson College graduate. He assumed sole proprietorship of the newspaper in 1882 and continued in that capacity until 1905.

As editor of the *Catoctin Clarion*, Charles E. Cassell became an important voice in local affairs. He was active in county politics, a supporter of railroad expansion, and a chronicler of the town’s dramatic growth. The railroad spurred economic activity, which included new knitting mills that employed a predominantly female workforce and an increase in orchard production on the slopes of the adjacent mountain. The Western Maryland also brought tourists to town, on their way to its new Pen-Mar mountain resort with a grand hotel, restaurants, carousel and other amusements. Perhaps Cassell’s most permanent legacy involved the change in Mechanicstown’s name. After the railroad announced that too many towns with “mechanics” in their name caused confusion, Charles Cassell’s suggestion of Thurmont won the support of local voters in 1894. He made the case that Thurmont meant, “Gateway to the Mountains.”

Charles E. Cassell sold the *Clarion* to the Clarion Publishing Company in 1905. Led by President J.W. Creeger with C.C. Waters as editor, the paper recorded important local events such as the opening in 1909 of electric inter-urban railway lines to Frederick and Hagerstown. A major outbreak of the Spanish Flu hit the town in 1918, and the impact of woman’s suffrage on local voter registrations in 1920 were noted in the paper.

The *Catoctin Clarion* returned to the control of the Cassell family in the persons of Dr. J. Howard Cassell and Charles E. Cassell, Jr. who acquired the paper in 1921. Sons of the long-time former editor, Dr. Cassell was local pharmacist while his brother assumed management of the editorial and business side. The *Clarion* ceased publishing in 1940.

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