

Gate House Museum plans exhibit, fund-raiser

By Ashley Reams, The Advocate of Eldersburg and Sykesville Writer

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The Sykesville Gate House Museum of History has a new exhibit.

The Sykesville Gate House Museum of History is going to showcase a new exhibit in its front hall by the end of next month, where a pile of rubble sat after a wall partially crumbled in November.

"You could stand here and push the wall," Museum Director Kari Greenwalt demonstrated, standing at the entrance to an adjacent room facing the hall, "and watch it move back and forth."

When Greenwalt and Jaime Bradley, museum curator, removed part of the plaster, the wood behind it disintegrated, Greenwalt said, because of years of termite damage.

Greenwalt saved a softball-sized chunk of the wood, which is covered with tiny holes and weighs little more than a crumpled piece of paper.

The museum, which was built in 1904 as the gate house for Springfield Hospital, closed for renovations in November.

The wall was repaired, and some of the floor boards were replaced.

Greenwalt and Bradley also reorganized rooms on the second floor of the museum. They added book shelves in the library, and with the help of the town's public works employees, brought a display case downstairs to the hall.

In the archive storage room, they replaced shelves to make room for more archives. The museum re-opened in December.

Now, Greenwalt and Bradley are researching the history of Sykesville and gathering photographs and artifacts for a new exhibit, which will showcase the town's history from before its establishment to its centennial celebration, which took place in May 2004.

The permanent exhibit, Greenwalt explained, will be set up like a timeline against the newly renovated wall, with important dates and information branching off. Display cases below the timeline will house photographs and objects pertinent to the town's history.

So far, the oldest photograph in the museum's possession is a tintype of the Sykes Hotel, taken prior to 1868 when a flood washed it, and much of the town, away.

The exhibit will also include information on James Sykes, for whom Sykesville is named; Wade Warfield, who built many of the historic buildings in Sykesville's downtown area; the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad; and Springfield Hospital, Greenwalt added.

"[Visitors] will be able to see where Sykesville started," she said. "We want to show people in an easy-to-use way what the town is about and what the museum is about."

"We're shooting to have this installed by the end of February," she added.

A photo album containing pictures of the attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, is the highlight of a new war exhibit, which displays photographs, medals and other artifacts from World War II and the Vietnam War.

Gaylon L. Lewis, a member of the U.S. Navy at the time, took the photographs and has loaned them to the museum by way of his son, David Lewis, a Sykesville police officer.

In March, Greenwalt said, she's hoping to have an American Indian exhibit in the parlor of the museum. Sykesville was a hunting ground for several American Indian tribes, she explained, and this exhibit will showcase that history.

Jack Ruby, a resident of Fairhaven Continuing Care Retirement Community, is a collector of American Indian artifacts, and Greenwalt estimated an eighth of his collection, including arrowheads, hammer stones and warheads, will make up much of the exhibit.

The exhibit will tie in with the museum's Spring History Walk, which will take place March 12.

Every other year, the museum hosts two history walks. This year, one walk is scheduled to explore the river area around Sykesville and discuss American Indian history, while the other walk is scheduled to explore the remnants of copper and iron mines along Md. 32.

Before the walks, though, the museum will be holding its next fund-raiser, the Wild Hearts Dance, set for Feb. 10.

"We're calling it Wild Hearts because it's near Valentine's Day, and we want to cater to people who may be single and wild or attached and wild about someone," Greenwalt said.

For more information about the Sykesville Gate House Museum of History's exhibits or events, contact the museum at 410-549-5150.

Reach staff writer Ashley Reams at 410-857-3317 or reamsa@lcniofd.com.

If you go

WHAT: Wild Hearts Dance

WHERE: Freedom Optimist Center

WHEN: Feb. 10, 8 p.m.-midnight

TICKETS: Available at the museum for \$10 in advance or \$12 at the door

MUSIC: A disc jockey will play classic rock and country.

FOOD: Pizza on sale and cash bar available.

BENEFITS: The Gate House Museum Expansion Fund