



# SYKESVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT NEWS

Spring, 2002

## Chairman's Letter

Spring is a wonderful time of year here in Sykesville.

The grass turns green, the flower bulbs bloom and the trees blossom all around. I am amazed at the number of beautiful gardens that are in Sykesville. At one time Sykesville had a thriving Garden Club. The remnants of those gardens can still be found in town. There has been talk of reviving the Garden Club and I hope that happens. If you are interested please contact the Town House.

This past year has been an active year for the Sykesville Historic District Commission. We are finalizing the Historic District Guidelines for the Warfield Historic District in conjunction with Richard Wagner of David H. Gleason Associates Inc. The guidelines will be a great tool for anyone interested in the development of the Warfield Project. We have seen the retirement of an original Sykesville Historic District Commission member Dorothy Schafer. Dorothy has been a volunteer in town for many years and her perspective and knowledge of Sykesville history will be missed. We continue to see signs of revitalization; ground has been broken on a large project on lower Main Street that will add retail commercial space to the town for the first time in many years.

As we head into spring I would like to remind the residents of the Historic District that grant funds from the town and Federal, State and local tax credits are available to approved projects. Please inquire at the Town House for information on these programs.

Mark Rychwalski, *Chairman*  
Sykesville Historic District Commission

## Children's Chorus To Help Celebrate Thelma Wimmer Day

Sykesville's official town historian, Thelma C. Wimmer, will be honored on her 93<sup>rd</sup> birthday at the Gate House Museum. The annual event will be held on Sunday, April 7<sup>th</sup> from 2:00-4:00 p.m. and new this year will be a performance by the Children's Chorus of Carroll County.

Mrs. Wimmer, a Sykesville resident since 1936, spear-headed the town's revitalization by helping with the purchase and restoration of Town House and Baldwin's Station. She worked to get the Historic District listed in the National Register of Historic Places as well. Concerned that Sykesville's history was disappearing, she began collecting artifacts, old newspapers and memorabilia which are the core of the Gate House Museum's collection.

Founded in 1986, the Children's Chorus of Carroll County consists of three different performing groups which present two major local concerts annually but also perform nationwide. The Bel Canto Singers, the most advanced choir consist-

*Continued on page 2.*



*Mrs. Wimmer greets museum visitors.*

## Wimmer Day, cont'd.

ing of 40 sixth through eighth graders, will make their debut in Sykesville for Thelma Wimmer Day. Previously, they have performed at Carnegie Hall and the White House. For Mrs. Wimmer they will sing *Happy Birthday* and then give a concert of patriotic songs.

Dorothy Schafer and Martha Streaker are co-chairing this year's event and will arrange the door prizes and refreshments. Please stop by and celebrate with Mrs. Wimmer!



*The Children's Chorus of Carroll County will perform on Thelma Wimmer Day.*

## Town Welcomes Fire Marshal Office

When the State Fire Marshal's Metro Region office decided to consolidate its Westminster and Ellicott City offices, it chose Sykesville for its central location. And the building chosen couldn't be more appropriate – it is the first official home of the Sykesville Volunteer Fire Company at 7543 Main Street. Although the town's fire department was established in 1933, it had a series of temporary homes until this building was erected in 1949. But

the need for more space forced the firemen to move and in 1984 the two-story formstone firehouse was converted to commercial property.

According to Ted Meminger, Deputy Chief State Fire Marshal for the Metro Region, the staff is responsible for investigating the cause and origin of fires and for conducting a criminal investigation when arson is suspected. Their territory includes all of Carroll, Frederick and Howard County and parts of Baltimore City, Montgomery, Prince Georges, Anne Arundel and Baltimore County.

“And two staff members are Labra-

dor Retrievers,” Meminger explained. Deputy Fire Marshal Tim Warner handles Isaiah and Deputy Fire Marshal Sarina Hart handles Vicky. Both dogs underwent several months of training to learn to sniff for flammable liquids.

The office is also responsible for public building safety inspections in buildings such as hospitals, schools and shopping centers. Town residents and business owners are invited to stop in and pick up information on fire safety.



*Above: Deputy Fire Marshal Tim Warner and Isaiah.*

*Left: New home of the State Fire Marshal's office.*

# At the Museum

☞ A life-long collector of Native American artifacts, Eldersburg resident Jack Ruby donated a large part of his collection to the to the Sykesville Gate House Museum of History. The Delaware Indians lived around Sykesville as early as 1724. A road roughly the same as today's Route 32 was called the Road from Delaware Bottom and the Patapsco River was known as Delaware Falls. The artifacts, collected all around Eldersburg and Sykesville, are now on display.

☞ A new exhibit features furniture, deeds and family photos of the Pattersons, one of Sykesville's most prominent families. William Patterson, a director of the B&O Railroad and one of the wealthiest men in America in the early 1800s, amassed a 3,000-acre farm in Sykesville. It was there he brought his daughter Betsy from their Baltimore home to separate her from Jerome Bonaparte, Napoleon's brother. In 1803 Betsy and Jerome did marry but Napoleon refused

to acknowledge her and had the marriage annulled. The land passed to his son and then to Frank Brown in 1880. In 1896, while governor of Maryland, Brown sold over 700 acres to the state for what is now Springfield Hospital. The house itself, built in the 1790s, was destroyed by fire in the early 1900s.

According to an 1898 article in *The Philadelphia Medical Journal*, local residents were indignant when they discovered that the "aristocratic Patterson estate was to become a 'lunatic asylum.' The village shopkeepers refused their wares to the pestiferous invaders. Immediate neighbors declared their intention of moving away." Laborers on the farm found themselves working with "dreaded crazy men." Approximately 138 acres of this land is now part of the town's Warfield Complex.

☞ No MTV. No online chat rooms. No *Sesame Street*. How did they do it? Before the age of electronics how did families spend their evenings? You'll be amazed! Come see the new exhibit



Photo courtesy of Maryland Historical Society.

*Betsy Patterson Bonaparte.*

"What Did You Do For Fun?" which explains what people did at home for recreation from the 1890s to the 1940s. Hint: When they said "Play some music," they didn't press a button, they went to their own instruments.

☞ New museum hours now include the first Saturday of the month from 1:00-6:00 p.m. as well as Wednesday and Sunday from 1:00-6:00 p.m. and Friday from 2:00-8:00 p.m.

## History Walk Tours Town and River

"This is not a virtual experience. This is the real stuff!" said Jim Purman, Curator of the Gate House Museum and leader of the sixth annual Spring History Walk. On March 17<sup>th</sup>, residents and visitors explored downtown and the Patapsco River. The town walk visited St. Joseph's Catholic Church, the Greenberg Building, the Old Main Line Visitors Center (Interlocking Tower), the Sykesville Town House and the Kasnia home on Norwood Avenue, which was formerly a firehouse and jail. The second group walked down the river to the ruins of the Elba Furnace. Mining engineer Johnny Johnsson described

how iron ore from the Springfield estate was smelted at the furnace and made into car wheel iron for the B&O Rail-



road. Damaged by the flood of 1868, it was never rebuilt. After the walk, participants enjoyed a special discount on dinner at Baldwin's Station.

*Left: Construction began in 1867 on St. Joseph's Catholic Church.*

*Bottom: Town House, originally the home of John McDonald.*



# Eagle Scout Unearths Dinky Track

Although best-known for freight and passenger service on the B&O, Sykesville's railroad history also includes another train. In 1908 the Dinky Line was constructed as a spur from the B&O Main Line to deliver coal and supplies to Springfield State Hospital. From the Main Line, the track crossed Oklahoma Road, ran west of Norwood Avenue, crossed Spout Hill Road on the trestle

that still exists today and continued across Springfield Avenue and onto the hospital property. The line operated until 1972 when the hospital converted from coal to fuel oil. Portions of the track exist throughout town but are overgrown with underbrush and trees. As the track reappears across Route 32 it is maintained by Northrop Grumman.

Now Mike Shenk of Boy Scout

Troop 735 will clear more of the Dinky Line for his Eagle Scout project. Starting behind the Gate House Museum, Mike will restore the track down to Route 32 with the help of fellow scouts, friends, relatives and town maintenance workers. This portion, about five feet wide and 1/8 mile long, will be



*Mike Shenk on the Dinky Track.*

maintained by the town after this work.

After doing research on the history of the Dinky Line, Mike will create a pamphlet containing his findings for use at the museum. He will also create a sign, donated by Sykesville sign maker Signed by Marcel, to display next to the track which will explain its history. Mike plans to complete the project this spring.



*A 1973 photo of the tracks.*

## Financial Incentives

The Town of Sykesville grants a 10% property tax credit for qualified rehabilitation expenditures for certain historic buildings, and a 5% property tax credit for qualified expenditures for architecturally compatible new construction, located in the historic district. In addition, grants of up to \$750 for owner-occupied residential property are available to assist residents in meeting the guidelines.

The State of Maryland offers a 25% tax credit on Maryland income taxes for qualified expenditures for the rehabilitation of a certified historic structure. The federal government offers a 20% tax credit on federal income taxes for qualified expenditures for the rehabilitation of income-producing certified historic structures.

For additional information, contact the Sykesville Historic District Commission or the Maryland Historical Trust at 410-514-7626 or [www.marylandhistoricaltrust.net](http://www.marylandhistoricaltrust.net).

## A Reminder from the Guidelines

“Before a property owner begins work, the Historic District Commission must approve any exterior alterations, new construction or changes to important landscape features.... The Historic District Commission meets the fourth Tuesday of each month to review applications for permit approval. The Town Zoning Administrator's Office must receive all application materials by 4:00 p.m. on the third Tuesday of the month in which the applicant wishes to have a review.”



### HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

Chairman

Mark Rychwalski

*Members*

Dave Ashman

Michael Burgoyne

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