



# SYKESVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT NEWS

Summer, 2002

## Chairman's Letter

With all that has happened to the world this past year, it is comforting to realize that Sykesville has remained a safe haven for us. The tragedies of 9/11 have served to make us all more appreciative of our small town way of life. We can still go on walks around our neighborhood. We can still take our kids to any Town park and event. We can still enjoy the many Town attractions we have, our museum, model trains, kids riding train and monthly Main Street events. I'm proud of the efforts of our local staff over the last several months that have allowed all of us to enjoy the way of life we have become accustomed to here in Sykesville.

I have been in Sykesville for a mere 15 years but the changes I have seen and am witnessing are rather dramatic. There has been a lot of development in and especially around Sykesville over the last 15 years. We are about to see development in our two Historic Districts. Projects on Main Street, behind Main Street and at the Warfield Complex have begun or will do so shortly. Look for these changes in the months to come.

It has been very gratifying for me to serve on the Historic District Commission since 1995 and as Chairman since 1996. During this time I have seen controversy, compromise and cooperation. The adoption of the *Historic District Guidelines* has made my volunteer service and the other Commissioners job much easier and these guidelines have helped property owners understand what the Town is doing by having a Historic District in Sykesville. Thanks to everyone who has submitted as application for permit to the Commission these past years, we have accomplished a lot!

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

## Town's Love of the Railroad Continues

Sykesville's founding father, James Sykes, had reason to smile back in 1831 when the B&O Railroad arrived in town. Weary travelers enjoyed food and drink in the newly opened Sykes Hotel, a four-story building between the tracks and the river. Another of his ventures had begun to pay off.

For the next two or three years the trains, passengers and freight came, pulled by the same engines - a solitary horse. Then the "motive power" changed to steam and for the first time since the dawn of history, it was possible to travel faster than a horse's top speed (about 35 mph). No wonder that the place where you mounted the "Iron Horse", the railroad station or depot became a kind of magical temple in American cities and towns like Sykesville.

Regrettably, we can no longer go down to Baldwin's Station and take the Iron Horse out of here. But we can sit in the dining room or on the porch outside and still watch real trains thunder past, usually at more than 35 mph.

Our kinship with the railroad, which still runs past our doorstep, is prized in Sykesville. It is valued by the S&P Rail-

*Continued on page 2.*



*Baldwin's Station today.*

## Trains, cont'd.

way which runs model trains of every size in a 1910 rail car, just yards from the Old Main Line; up the hill by the Little Sykes Railway where you can ride for free if you're less than four feet tall; by the reconstructed Switching Tower where you can view it all for 360 degrees; and by the Gate House Museum exhibiting its many artifacts, books and memorabilia of the golden age of railroading.

Jim Purman, *Curator*  
Sykesville Gate House Museum  
of History

## At The Museum

In honor of town historian Thelma Wimmer, the Sykesville Gate House Museum held a membership drive this spring which brought in 42 new members. As a result, a Museum Members Only event is in progress. On May 18<sup>th</sup>, May 27<sup>th</sup> and June 13<sup>th</sup>, members were invited to "excavate" hundreds of photographs and negatives donated by the Appalachian Outreach Mission. These came from the archives of a photographer working in Sykesville in the 1940s and 50s. Members attempt to identify people or events pictured and preserve them for museum storage.

The restoration of the Dinky Track behind the museum is almost complete, thanks to Boy Scout Mike Shenk and his volunteers who cleared underbrush and trees away. Originally, the track was a spur from the B&O Main Line to Springfield Hospital.

The museum will hold a special weekend exhibit June 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> on the B&O Railroad to help celebrate RailFest.

Museum hours are Wednesday, Sunday and the first Saturday of the month from 1:00-6:00 p.m. and Friday from 2:00-8:00 p.m.

## Neighbor News

"You'd never know you're only half an hour from a major city," remarked **Karin Christensen** about why she and her husband, **Colby**, chose Sykesville when they relocated from Utah. "I like the almost rural feel and being near all the conveniences of a larger town at the same time." Initially residents of the Sykesville Apartments, they moved last fall to 7426 Springfield Avenue in the Historic District. With three children (**Josiah**, four and a half, **Hannah**, nearly three and **Jacob**, three months) Karin particularly enjoys all the playgrounds in town. "And Josiah just loves the Little Sykes Railway."

New to downtown is **Auburn Precision Design Fabrication** at 7550 Main Street. Most recently the home of the Mission Store, the building once housed the Harris Grocery Store. Now owner **Deb Berry** offers window treatments, slipcovers, upholstery and accessories made with the customer's own fabric. She is assisted by her mother, **Dotty Clayton**, and **Lidia Ramirez**. A resident of Ellicott City, Deb chose Sykesville for its "quiet and affordability with visibility. I feel like I was born to be here. People look out for you. I feel like I belong already." The shop is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Watch for their grand opening celebration in June.



*A farm scene photographed by Elsie Jones.*

## Visiting the Jones Sisters

Frances (Fannie), Ida and Elsie Jones were famous throughout the state for their photographs of historic buildings, farm scenes and still-lives of flowers. Elsie took the photos, Ida developed and hand-colored them with oil paints and Fannie wrote the histories that went with the photos. Jim Purman conducted an oral history with Louis Forster, who had known the Jones sisters as a young boy. In the 1920s he often traveled with his uncle from Camden Station in Baltimore to Sykesville to visit them.

Ida Jones would drive her sisters, Mr. Forster and his uncle, also a photographer, through the surrounding countryside to take pictures and picnic. "(Elsie) would stop and take pictures of cows grazing in meadows...one of their favorite bucolic scenes," Mr. Forster said.

At their house on Springfield Avenue, the sisters had a shop in the dining room where they sold their embroidery, Christmas cards and notepaper. People came in to browse and check out a book in their lending library in the living room. "I think they had just general fiction. Nothing Shakespeare or anything like that," reported Mr. Forster. And behind the house, Mr. Forster continued, they had "1,000 leghorn chickens...and they shipped eggs to New York state."

To read more, stop by the Gate House Museum.



*Alexis Luther at 7324 Brown Street.*



*7546 Norwood Avenue.*



*7534 Norwood Avenue.*

## Brown Cottages Evolve Over Time

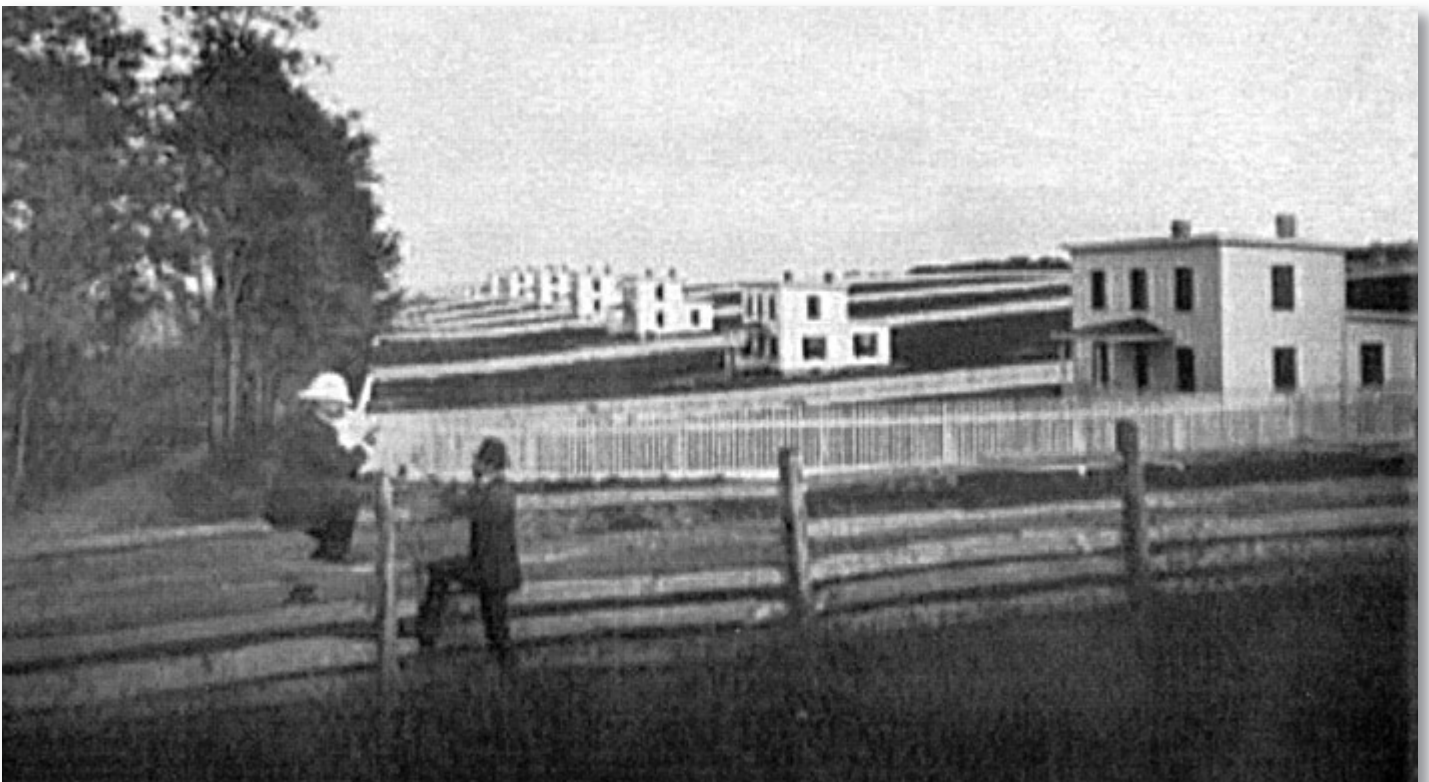
In December, 1884, the *Democratic Advocate* reported, “Mr. Frank Brown will build twelve (later increased to 20) cottages on one of the new avenues...this winter. Each...will be uniform size and the best of material will be used throughout. They will be painted in keeping with the buildings on his large estate.” Brown, owner of the 2,500-acre Springfield estate and later governor of Maryland,

built the cottages as rental properties. By June, 1885, the paper stated, “Six of the twenty houses...are completed, painted white with green shutters.” Brown went on to build more cottages in the same style closer to the train station. One area, Cottage Grove, was described by the paper in 1886 as being “...connected by a boardwalk, and one large diningroom accommodates all.”

In October of 1885, Brown brought William Henry Jackson, a well-known Denver photographer, to Sykesville to

photograph his estate and the town. Then in 1888, due to his wife’s illness, Frank Brown began selling his cottages as well as most of his farmland.

Looking around Sykesville today, many of these Brown Cottages still exist, although some have undergone extensive renovations. Two whose front facades are most like the originals are at 718 Oklahoma Road and 7324 Brown Street while two most extensively altered are at 7534 and 7546 Norwood Avenue.



*Brown Cottages on Springfield Avenue photographed by W.H. Jackson in 1885.*

*Photo courtesy of Library of Congress*

# Scouts Learn Sykesville's History

On Main Street Saturday morning, April 27<sup>th</sup>, 50 Junior Girl Scouts from five different troops, all part of Community 65 Girl Scouts, came to clean up downtown as part of their Junior Jamboree. Afterwards, Town Manager Matt Candland greeted them at Town House and then Mark Bennett, president of the S&P Railroad, described the role of the railroad in Sykesville's history. They continued on their history walk to Millard Cooper Park where troop leaders Joanne Hungerman and Ellen Morucci explained the history of several famous Sykesville women: town historian Thelma Wimmer, photographers Ida, Fanny and Elsie Jones and Susanna Warfield, who founded a four-year preparatory school, Warfield College, in 1894.

As part of work on a Local Lore Junior Badge, the scouts also experi-

mented with tin punching. Then, emulating the Jones Sisters, they hand-colored black and white copies of the sisters' photographs. The girls donated their work to the Gate House Museum for display.



Scouts colored this Jones sisters' photo.

# Up on the Roof

In the late 1800s, Sykesville was a fashionable summer retreat for Baltimoreans. In May, 1879, the *Democratic Advocate* quotes a Sykesville resident, "...people...are busy white-washing and painting in anticipation of June sunshine, which drives the rich man from the sultry city to the cool shades and healthy hills of the Freedom District, where people live longer than in any other district in the country." And on June 16, 1883, the paper said, "Summer boarders are expected to arrive next week, when all available space will be taken, and the father of the family will sleep on the kitchen roof."

On August 23, 1884, the paper reports, "A Baltimore belle, who left here for Berkley Springs, has returned. She says she prefers Sykesville to the Springs. Now whether it is the scenery, the water or the boys, we are unable to say."

# Financial Incentives

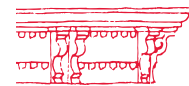
The Town of Sykesville grants a 10% property tax credit for qualified rehabilitation expenditures for certain historic buildings, and a 5% property tax credit for qualified expenditures for architecturally compatible new construction, located in the historic district. In addition, grants of up to \$750 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

Duane Doxzen

Paul Esposito

Maureen McCall

Wiley Purkey

Russ Vreeland

Ombudsman

Susan Catling

410-239-0300

[tdscat@aol.com](mailto:tdscat@aol.com)