

Doorway to the Past

Selections from the Permanent Collection of

The Historical Society of Carroll County



The heart of any museum is its collections. The history of mankind is written in its artifacts and each is a powerful document with a story to tell. And it is the artifacts that visitors come to see for artifacts have great power. They awaken our memories, stir our imaginations and provide us with a tangible link to the past. For over 60 years, the Historical Society of Carroll County has been dedicated to preserving this link.

During the winter of 1939, a group of local citizens met to discuss the formation of a county historical society. Their immediate goal was the preservation of the historic Shellman house in Westminster which was threatened by demolition. The Main Street house had been home to community leader and amateur historian Mary Bostwick Shellman. The group incorporated as the Historical Society of Carroll County with the stated purpose "to collect and preserve all papers, books, documents or other matter or things pertaining to the history of Carroll County." The Society's purchase of the Shellman house gave it a historically significant property to preserve and a facility for presenting public programs.

The Historical Society immediately began acquiring artifacts to furnish the house and for special exhibits. Most of the donations were mixed collections of heirlooms

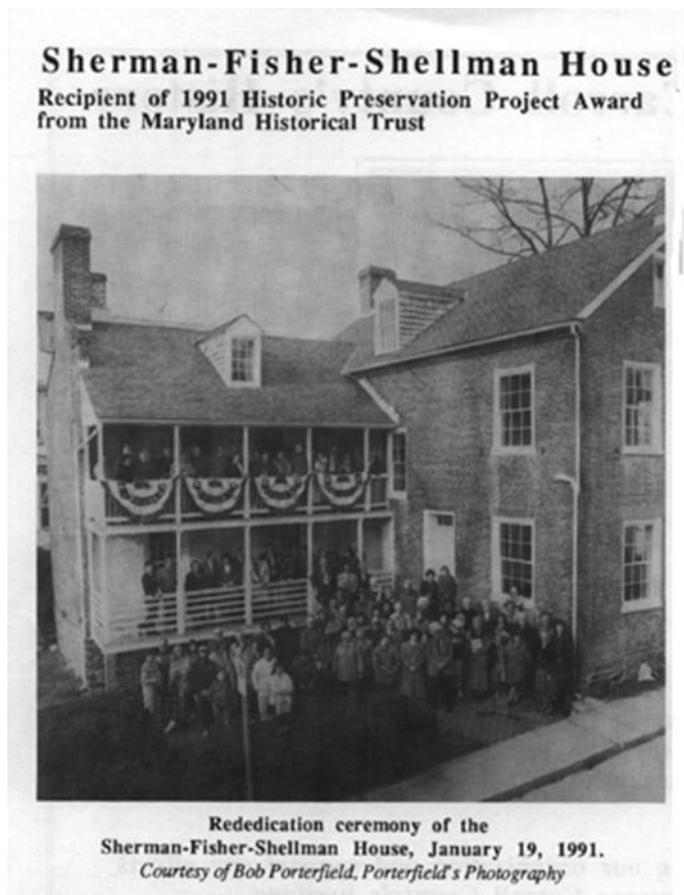
cherished by local families who wished to see them preserved for posterity. These donations, combined with occasional loans, allowed the Society to sponsor exhibitions on topics including furniture, redware, pewter, teapots and flags. Eventually, the Society opened an exhibition room in the county office building in Westminster for displaying artifacts not used in furnishing the Shellman house.

In 1966, the Commissioners of Carroll County purchased the historic Kimmey house, next door to the Shellman house, and donated the property to the Historical Society. The house's owner, Mrs. Harry M. Kimmey, had first raised the idea of saving Shellman house and it was in her home that the founders of the Society met.

The Society renovated Kimmey house with the addition in 1968 of an auditorium, named for Society President James M. Shriver and benefactor Victor Weybright, an exhibit room and a reference library. Over the years, as the numbers of researchers using the library increased, the library expanded, eventually taking over the exhibit room.

During the past two decades, the auditorium has been the site for several temporary exhibitions highlighting selected areas of the Society's collection including textiles, photographs and military items. Now, with funding from the Maryland Museum Assistance Program, the auditorium has been converted for permanent use as an exhibition space. Panels over the windows block sunlight which causes damage to artifacts, track lighting fixtures allow light levels to be controlled and new cases, constructed of inert materials, protect the artifacts on exhibit.

People collect things for a variety of reasons. Some buy objects for what they are worth and treat them only as investments. Some acquire things for their beauty. Some keep souvenirs of places and events that have special meaning for them. Some collect



out of nostalgia, seeking things from a simpler time such as toys from their childhood. But museums collect objects for what they can teach us.

Through the study of artifacts, museums learn much about the ideas, beliefs, values and lifestyles of the past. The tools people used, the homes they lived in, the furniture they sat on, the places they worked, the clothes they wore, the food they ate – all these things can reveal as much about a society as its art or literature.

Doorway to the Past presents artifacts from the Historical Society's permanent collection. They have been organized in five sections according to the types of stories they tell. Many artifacts tell several stories and could easily fit into more than one section. A quilt, for example, is a utilitarian household object but also an artistic creation. As you tour the exhibit, look closely at the artifacts and see if you can discover their stories.

RELICS



Since the days when Roman soldiers returned from battle with treasures from conquered lands, objects have been collected because of their association with some historic person or event. During the Renaissance, European nobles acquired antiquities, oddities and artworks. The nobility displayed their collections in cabinets for the purpose of impressing visitors. Early museum collections were similar in nature to these "cabinets of curiosities." While most museums still have some of these relics in their collection, these objects are now valued for reasons that the original donor would

never have imagined. Today, museums collect not for the material itself but to understand the culture which produced it. A tavern lock from the 1790s may have survived because George Washington touched it but it is valued today for what it teaches us about the importance of taverns in colonial society, the technology required to forge such a lock and 18th century building techniques. What other meanings can you find hidden within these relics? (Pictured - Oak settee, made in 1892 with wood from the Union Church in Westminster Cemetery.)

COMMUNITY ARTIFACTS

Man is a social animal which creates strong communities. Artifacts tell about the associations people form out of necessity and out of shared beliefs. Governments provide structure to the dealings between people. Businesses provide goods and services that people cannot produce for themselves. Those with similar beliefs and interests join fraternal organizations, civic groups and clubs. Loyalty to one's community often was expressed in military service, the willingness to defend it at all costs. The diversity of Carroll County's communities is reflected in the variety of artifacts they have created. What community organizations exist today and what do they say about the people who join them? (*Spool cabinet, c.1880, used in Nusbaum & Jordan's store in Westminster.*)



ART OBJECTS



Many objects were originally acquired because they were beautiful and that beauty is why they survived. But these artifacts also tell us what was considered beautiful, how people decorated their homes or businesses and what type of art people could afford. Very few people could afford to have an original portrait painted or commission a bust by William Rinehart and the fact that such pieces exist tells us a great deal about the values of their owners. Far more people could afford the mass-produced prints and sculptures which were manufactured beginning in the 19th century and this led to new styles in home decorating. What do you use to decorate your life and what will those objects tell future generations about you? (*Marble bust of*

Mrs. Sarah Mygatt by William Henry Rinehart, 1860.)

HOUSEHOLD ARTIFACTS

The majority of artifacts in the Society's collections reflect the everyday life of the average Carroll countian. The objects of everyday life tell us about the types of goods available locally, the ability to transport goods, new developments in manufacturing

techniques, the amount of hard currency families had available for spending, changing tastes in styles and colors and the goods needed to run a household. How do these household objects differ from the objects in our homes? (*Appliqued quilt made by Margaret E. Buckey in 1857 when she was 20 years old.*)



PERSONAL ARTIFACTS

We all own things which have a special meaning for us. These may be gifts from a loved one, awards given for some special achievement, objects with religious significance or a memento from a trip or special event. Because of the strong emotional attachment to these objects, personal items are often handed down from generation to generation. What objects do you own which have special meaning for you?



Wood doll carved by Daniel Woodyard, a slave, for his daughter or granddaughter, c.1830.



Pennsylvania German kistch (chest) made for Salome Lehman in 1781; decorative hardware made by David Barnhart.

The Historical Society wishes to express its appreciation to the following for their support of *Doorway to the Past*:

Principal Underwriter
The Carroll County Times

Benefactors
Carroll County Bank & Trust Co.
Lehigh Portland Cement Co.
The Community Foundation of Carroll County

Sponsors
Anchor Pharmacy
Farmers & Merchants Bank
FCNB Bank
Random House, Inc.
Shelter Systems, Limited
Union National Bank