



Jody Brumage in the office in Burkittsville where he works on archiving items from the Motherway/Shافر House near Burkittsville.
—Citizen/Judy Zeck

Burkittsville's Brumage has an eye for 'public history'

Preserving the past one item at a time

by Judy Zeck

Jody Brumage is looking over what's left of a life, thinking about how it illuminates the history of a community. His work may begin with the estate of Mary Shafer Motherway, but it ends with a good look at her time on earth—which reached out to 103 years.

Most of the furniture and other items of value that were in the Motherway house when Mrs. Motherway died were sold at auc-

tion. Other items were scavenged by vandals but there were still things left in the house that have historic interest. Those items are being chronicled and archived by Brumage, who has already been working with the South Mountain Heritage Society's collection for several years.

Brumage grew up on South Mountain near Burkittsville. His family has roots in the area that predate the Civil War, and he has always been interested in history.

"My grandmother lived three doors down from us when I was growing up, and she would tell me old stories and drive me



The Registered Nursing Certification for Mary Shafer from 1926.
—Citizen/Judy Zeck

around to all the old places," he says.

When he went to college at Shepherd University, majoring in history seemed like a natural progression. At Shepherd he studied public history and historic preservation.

"'Public history' is a relatively new field in history," Brumage said. "It's an umbrella term that covers museum work, archivists, and the people who work to preserve history for a public audience— Park Rangers, docents, tour guides and others."

Brumage

[Cont. from p. 6]

He went to Shepherd because of its location and because of the program. He worked as an intern at SU's Robert C. Byrd Center for Congressional History and Education. The center houses the papers for several congressmen from West Virginia, and he became interested in the process of archiving and preserving historic documents. Meanwhile he volunteered at the South Mountain Heritage Society in Burkittsville, which allowed him to take what he was learning and apply it practically.

Brumage graduated from Shepherd in 2013 and was able to get a full time job at the Byrd Center. He is now in graduate school working on a Masters degree in archival management. His Motherway/Shافر Collection work is part of getting that degree.

The Burkittsville Preservation Association acquired the Shafer-Motherway House in September 2016. The BPA's three directors—Todd Remaley, Keith Murray and Paul Gilligan— were able to go through the house and take items out for preservation. The artifacts were taken to a space over Gilligan's storefront where they are protected from further damage. The BPA asked Brumage to formalize the items into a collection for a future museum at the house.

the family— and they give an interesting snapshot of life in that house through the years."

Volunteers are still finding things as they work on the property.

"Decisions have to be made on items' historic significance, and they are brought to the protected space immediately, to prevent further deterioration," Brumage said. "Some items are not taken, such as old food items and some poisons which were found. But we take photographs and document all the items we do not take.

"I was amazed at the amount of stuff that was left," said Brumage. "Some really important documents that survived."

A collection of small items was found behind the mantle in the parlor. Among them is an old tintype with a barely visible image.

Brumage goes through steps to evaluate items found in the house, starting with recording where in the house it was found.

"Then I look at its historic value, and if it has potential value as a research tool. I also look at whether it is a hazard— for example something that is covered in mold could affect other items in the collection. This stage is a discovery process."

Documents are sorted and filed with notations as to what they are. Old financial documents that go back to the 1920s include old checks which give insight into where Mary Motherway was



A cloth from the Hamilton W. Shafer store in Burkittsville was found in the house. —Citizen/Judy Zeck

"The collection contains manuscripts and documents as well as three dimensional objects," said Brumage. "They have provided a lot of information and context on

living at various times. Brumage tries to figure out who was associated with each item. Most belonged to Mary Motherway since she was the last resident of



A collection of artifacts from the Shafer/Motherway House. The items in the box on the right include a rosary found in the house. Mary Shafer Motherways mother was a Catholic and she and her siblings were raised in the Catholic Church in Petersville. The items on the right were found behind the mantle and include an old tintype. —Citizen/Judy Zeck

the house and spent many years there after her retirement from nursing. But some go back to her parents and siblings.

Mary Shafer Motherway's nursing certification, received in Washington DC in 1926, was found in a bedroom upstairs. They also found a collection of nurses' veils and headpieces, of different styles and period. Motherway worked as a nurse for ten years in the Panama Canal Zone in the 1920s. She also worked in Norfolk, Va., Frederick and at a women's prison in West Virginia.

A collection of old sheet music includes some pieces dating back to 1888, with Nora Shafer's name on them. There was a bulletin from the Christmas service of the Lutheran Church

in 1918 and one from the Reformed Church's childrens service in 1911.

There was a handwritten tablet full of Spanish phrases from when Motherway and her husband lived in the Panama Canal Zone from 1927 to 1937, when he died. She accompanied his body back to Maryland; he is buried in the St. Mary's Catholic Church cemetery. She continued working after he died but never remarried.

A piece of cloth in a pile of clothing and fabric scraps with "H. W. Shafer" printed on it was apparently from Mary's father Hamilton Shafer's business. There is an advertisement and 1911 calendar book from M. E. Wheeler Fertilizer, in Rutland, VT. Hamilton Shafer owned a large granary and warehouses near the train depot in Gapland, over the mountain in Washington County.

Once these items and many more are sorted and catalogued, they will go into archival quality folders and boxes.

"It is exciting to learn as I go through all of this," Brumage said. "These items humanize the people who made that house their

A window to the past

Hamilton Willard Shafer was born in 1860 and died in 1919. According to *Williams History of Frederick County* he was "the owner of the largest warehouses in the county, located in Gapland Md." He went to school in Burkittsville, then went into business for himself before he was 21. In 1890 he put up a large warehouse in Gapland where he had an elevator and coal and lumber yards.

In early January 1919 H. W. Shafer was injured during a butchering. He scalded his leg and it became infected. The family used to tell of a terrible fire that lit up the sky to the west while their father lay dying. According to a report in the *Frederick Post* of January 8, 1919,

"While the owner was lying dangerously ill with blood poisoning, the large grain elevator of Hamilton W. Shafer of Burkittsville, and located along the railroad between Hagerstown and Weverton, was totally destroyed by fire of unknown origin, on Saturday night between seven and eight o'clock. There was a considerable quantity of grain in the elevator at the time and all of it was destroyed. The fire is thought to have been caused by a spark from the railroad engine."

The newspaper goes on to report that other buildings in Gapland were destroyed and at one point the whole town was threatened with destruction.

Shafer died of the blood poisoning three weeks later on January 26, 1919, leaving his wife and three children. He was 58 years old.

home for more than a century."

Brumage will complete his work for a Masters in May and as part of that process he will produce an inventory of the Shafer/Motherway collection, make a web presentation of the items, and develop a collection policy for the project.