



The Shafer/Motherway house at the corner of Gapland and Catholic Church roads.

Can this house be saved?

New group forms to preserve Shafer house near Burkittsville

by Judy Zeck

A group of residents in the Burkittsville area has formed the Burkittsville Preservation Association Inc. to acquire and preserve an historic property east of town.

The property, including a house, barn and outbuildings at the intersection of Gapland and Catholic Church roads, has been known as the Motherway House or the Shafer Farm.

The BPA became the owners of record in September 2016, acquiring it from Shannon Shafer, who in turn inherited it from his aunt, Mary Shafer Motherway, who was the last person to live in the yellow brick house.

The house and five acres of property was part of the larger Shafer Farm, which had been in the family for many years and played a role in the Civil War during the battle of South Mountain. Martin Shafer got the farm from James Garrett in 1860 and then sold it to his nephew Hamilton Shafer, a businessman in Burkittsville. Hamilton Shafer was the father of Mary Motherway.

The Burkittsville Preservation Association obtained the property from Shannon Shafer, the great nephew of Mary Motherway, through her estate, with the provision that it be preserved and become a museum highlighting the role of the Shafer family in the

area.

"It should be preserved for historical purposes, and it should recognize the Shafer family and its importance to the area," said Paul Gilligan, spokesperson for the group. According to Gilligan, the BPA is small but is planning to work with other preservation groups to create public interest.

Motherway's father, Hamilton Willard Shafer, was a well-known local businessman who, according to Williams' *History of Frederick County* was the "owner of the largest warehouse in the county, situated at Gapland, Md." He was born in 1860 and began in business for himself before he was 21. In 1899 he purchased the farm and enlarged the house. In 1890 he put up a large warehouse at Gapland, where he had an elevator as well as coal and lumber yards. He married Sarah Margaret Arnold Shafer and they had three children: Ralph Alexis, Nora Margaret, and Mary Hamilton Shafer.

In September 1862, the house was the headquarters of General William B. Franklin during the

Battle of South Mountain. Franklin's troops used the house and surrounding farm as a staging area from which they fought at Cramptons Gap, successfully holding it from Confederate troops. After the victory Franklin returned to the Shafer Farm rather than continuing to pursue Lees's Army.

Gilligan noted the ridge along South Mountain has been designated as part of a State Battlefield.

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Motherway house

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Groups want to promote the Battle of South Mountain as part of the bigger picture of the Civil War in the area.

"The State of Maryland sees this as a way to develop tourism and bring people to the area to spend money and the State will get the tax revenue," Gilligan said. "We would like local groups to work with us because the State does not want to manage grants and property. These five acres of the Shafer Farm will be part of a group effort."

The house needs stabilization work first

There is a lot to do at the house which is in disrepair. It has been empty since the year 2000 when Mary Motherway went to live in a nursing home. She died in 2003 at the age of 103. An auction was held for most of the items in the house, barn and outbuildings but after that the house stood empty.

The roof leaked and caused a lot of damage to parts of the house interior. Vandals broke in and sprayed graffiti on the walls, left trash inside and even had a campfire in a second floor room. Even before it was sitting empty, the

house had gone for many years without much upkeep.

Gilligan said the immediate plan is to seal the roof to prevent further damage. "With an assistance grant for preservation we will bring out an architect and engineer to evaluate and probe the house and make recommenda-

can get a capital grant.

"We are always looking for any assistance, whether monetary or as labor," Gilligan said. "We will try to do certain things ourselves to improve the property. Initially we'll be working on repairing the windows."

Gilligan owns a historic build-



A rose-colored outfit worn by Mary Motherway is among the artifacts being catalogued by Jody Brumage. A dress uniform of the public health service was also found—Citizen/Judy Zeck

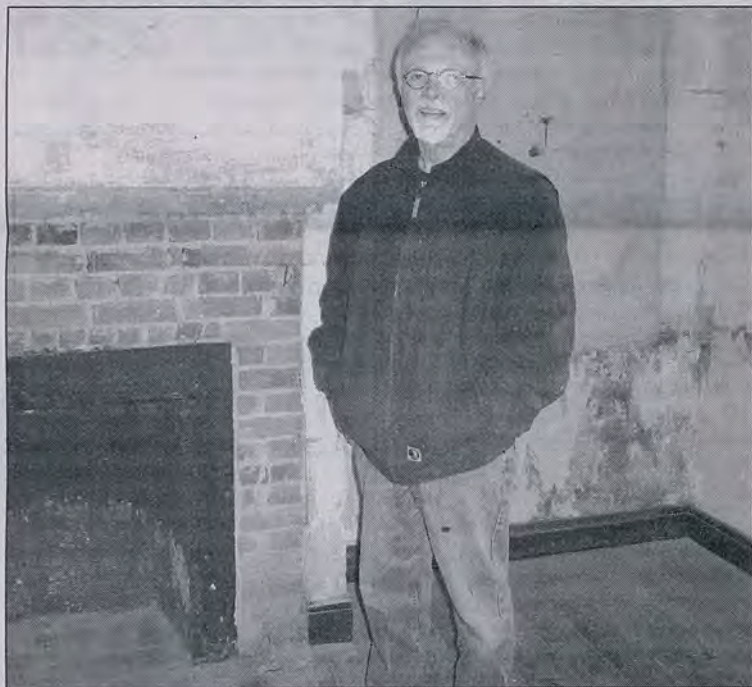
tions," he said. "This will assist with stabilization, but is not a full repair. It will buy time until we

ing in Burkittsville, an old store on the southwest corner of Route 17 and Main Street which he preserves as a store and opens on the weekends. His building is the headquarters of the Burkittsville Preservation Association. Upstairs there is a room devoted to archiving and storing items from the property which will potentially become part of the future museum.

Jody Brumage with the South Mountain Heritage Society is in the process of collecting and archiving all of the items salvaged from the house.

Among the items were the uniform that Mary Motherway wore during her time as a public health nurse and a skirt suit that belonged to her. Mrs. Motherway was raised in the house but then moved away to take a job with the public health service in the Panama Canal Zone. She married, but her husband died young and she had no children. She never remarried but returned to live in the Shafer family farm after she retired.

"This is just starting," Gilligan said. "There is lots to do."



Paul Gilligan, of the Burkittsville Preservation Association, inside the Shafer/ Motherway House. — Citizen / Judy Zeck