

## What's your story, Carroll: Curator keeps track of Sykesville artifacts

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### **Walking past an old railroad bell and American Indian arrowheads, Kari Greenwalt started to tell the story of Napoleon's brother.**

Jerome Bonaparte came to Sykesville - before there was a place called Sykesville - and found a bride at the Springfield Estate.

"Yeah, that Napoleon," she said noticing the visitor's surprise when she retraced the tale.

"But when [Jerome Bonaparte and Elizabeth Patterson] returned to France, Napoleon refused to accept the marriage," Greenwalt said. "He wouldn't let her get off the boat and come ashore."

The 24-year-old with shoulder length sandy blonde hair and a schoolteacher's demeanor knows these stories because it's her job: Greenwalt is curator of the town's Gatehouse Museum.

It's a job that entails keeping track of the town's artifacts, managing the museum and organizing fundraisers.

It's also one of three jobs Greenwalt holds down. She's also a secretary in the law office of Stephen P. Bourexis in Westminster and a history columnist for a local paper. And until recently she was juggling a fourth job at a store in Carrolltown Center.

When asked how she manages her time, she just laughed and said, "We don't currently know." But she's usually at the Gatehouse Museum at least a few days a week.

She's only the second curator in the museum's history.

In June of 2002, Greenwalt succeeded Jim Purman, who still works there as the assistant curator.

"We traded places," Greenwalt said.

It was at Purman's request that the two swapped jobs. Purman said he saw Greenwalt's energy and ability and asked the town to switch their positions.

"Ever since she's been there," Purman, 77, said, "I've said to her 'For one so young, you certainly know how to do things.'"

Growing up in Eldersburg, Greenwalt wanted to be a schoolteacher. But while earning a history degree in college she got a little sidetracked.

It was because of her love of history that Greenwalt ended up at the museum. It started with a conversation with Purman.

She was a clerk at the Copy Post in Eldersburg, where Purman was a regular customer. One day he saw her reading "Jane Eyre," and asked if it was for a class.

"She said 'No, I just like it,' " Purman said. He was impressed and they started talking. When he found out she was a Civil War re-enactor he decided to ask her to come to a Christmas open house at the museum.

Greenwalt started volunteering there a few weeks later in January of 1998, while she was in college at Towson University. In December of that year she was hired as an assistant.

"I ended up loving this so much," she said.

Greenwalt had found a career in a place she never expected.

In middle school, she rode by the Gatehouse every day on the school bus - before it was a museum. The building was dilapidated and in disrepair, she said.

"I thought they should tear it down," she said. "It's a good thing they didn't listen to me."

But that was before Greenwalt knew much about Sykesville and before the Gatehouse had become home to the town's museum, she said.

It opened Sept. 7, 1997, after starting as a collection of historical artifacts at the Town House.

After four years of working there, she can rattle off tales of the town like they're Aesop's Fables - from stories of the Jones sisters' hand-touched photos to Napoleon's brother to the last resident of the house, William Shipley's, funeral in the parlor. When she tells them it's like being told a bedtime story: Her soft warm voice lilting over the details, giving dramatic pauses.

The experience has changed her career choice, she said. While she doesn't think she'll be a curator for the rest of her life - the Sykesville job is only 20 hours a week, after all - it has exposed her to other possibilities.

She helps plan events, like fund-raisers for the museum. And event planning is something she thinks she'd like to explore in the future. In the meantime, she's content with the museum job.

"It's really just something I love," she said.