

## A walk into the past

By Marisa Navarro, Times Staff Writer

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### Two abandoned stone structures sit near the CSX railroad tracks and the Patapsco River in Sykesville, but they once served the region's copper industry and helped educate young men.

At the town's Spring History Walk Sunday, Kari Greenwalt gave people a glimpse of the town's past by showing them the remains of Elba Furnace and Warfield College.

For 13 years, volunteers and Gate House Museum of History members have organized the walk to give people a better sense of the town's history.

"People like to see what they read and hear about," said Greenwalt, museum curator. "This is hand's on."

On the 2 1/2-hour walk, participants saw the Elba Furnace that smelted iron ore and copper from nearby mines from 1847 to 1868. At one point, the furnace produced 4,000 tons of copper a year, according to James Walter Pierce, who studies mills near the Patapsco River and who also attended the walk. At one time, seven massive furnaces melted iron ore and copper, now only pieces of one furnace hearth covered with brush remains.



BRENDAN BUSH/STAFF PHOTO

Kari Greenwalt shares some of the history of the Elba Furnace with participants in the Spring History Walk in Sykesville Sunday.

Pierce told the 30 participants to appreciate looking at the Elba Furnace because in 20 years, environmental conditions likely will dismantle the furnace's hearth.

On a hill above the Elba Furnace sits the former Warfield College, which was Susanna Warfield's home before it was turned into a school. Warfield was a benefactor who helped build the now defunct Holy Trinity Church and St. Barnabas Episcopal Church.

Like the Elba Furnace, only pieces of the college and its springhouse remain. In 1923, a fire destroyed the house and, over time, trees have fallen on the structure. The state owns the structures, and it has done little upkeep on them, Greenwalt said.

This is the first time that Greenwalt has led a tour at the walk. Jim Purman started it more than a decade ago and led the talks. Purman retired last year, and it was up to Greenwalt to start leading her own tours. Although Greenwalt has assisted on walks for approximately five years, she said she was somewhat scared to do one.

Sykesville Mayor Jonathan Herman said Greenwalt brought the walk to life by showing pictures and drawings of the furnace and school and reading Warfield's letters aloud. "Jim was great, but all [the information was] in his head," said Herman who has been on nearly every history walk. "It's great that she actually uses notes and props."

Nearly 200 people attended the walk last year because many thought they would be discontinued with Purman's departure. Greenwalt and other town volunteers wanted to carry on the tradition, she said.

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