

Allegany County Museum: An Historic Hub

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Visitors to the downtown Cumberland Mall will find the Allegany County Museum a destination worth exploring to better appreciate the area's history. Located on the first floor of the Lila Building, the museum houses a collection reflecting life in different eras.

"Our mission is to serve as an interpretive center for the community," says Gary Bartik, the museum's president. "We had more than 4,000 visitors last year."

A brief history of the building is located in the foyer. On the left side of the main area are two photo exhibits framed in native red oak. "Cumberland: The Birth and Growth of a Victorian City," displays the city's evolution from agricultural village to thriving manufacturing and commercial center. "Architecture: Allegany County a History," incorporates doors, railings and arches between panels with photos of crude log structures, "vernacular" houses and elaborate Victorian styles.

An area set up as a fire hall office, complete with spittoon, honors bygone hose companies. Other artifacts include a fire alarm, fire hydrant, hose carts, uniforms and tools.

To the right are exhibits from Kelly-Springfield Tire and Westvaco (now MeadWestvaco). The green Kelly-Springfield neon sign that once lit New York City's Times Square now sits in a photo of the "Great White Way." Below, a "tire worker" is at work, surrounded by a semi-circle of tires manufactured from 1900 through 1974. MeadWestvaco, a manufacturer of paper, packaging and specialty chemicals, displays the company's history from its origins in 1888 at Luke Mill to the present. Nearby, an Allegany County "First Residents" exhibit displays artifacts from the Paleo-Indian, Archaic and Woodland periods.

Immigrants from Germany, Ireland and Scotland founded the Queen City

Brewing Company and German Brewing Company, among others. Two display cases feature Cumberland's "99 Bottles of Beer on the Wall" along the right rear wall and in a back bar from the First and Last Chance Saloon. A banged-up copper still is visual evidence that some brewmeisters occasionally fell afoul of the hated "revenuers" in this neck of the Appalachian woods.

Glass companies that flourished for about 50 years produced tableware sold in elite department and jewelry stores throughout America. Examples of etched stemware and elaborate glass canes are arranged in backlit cases in what were once bank vaults.

To the left of the entrance, a room houses much of folk artist Claude Yoder's hand-carved wooden and stone birds, hawks, owls and images of his Amish neighbors.

A room to the right houses a whimsical display, "History in Your Attic," celebrating photographs as historical documents.

A 1915 Model T and 1924 Ford Truck from the Queen City Brewing Company sit in the center rear area. Nearby, hand-crafted models of a C&O canal boat and former Cumberland hotel/passenger railroad station evoke the past.

A square model of the former post office that now houses the District Court at 3 Pershing Street hints at the museum's future. The building will eventually become the permanent home of the Allegany County Museum.

The Allegany County Museum is open May through December, Tuesday through Sunday, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The Lila Building is located at 81 Baltimore Street in the Downtown Cumberland Mall. For more information, call the Museum at 301-777-7200.

