

A Look Back in Time Through the Lens of a Ledger

By Virginia Clarity

The records people keep can give a wealth of knowledge and history.

William Harmon Kephart was born in 1856, into a family of weavers. In his early years he spent his days in his father's handloom woolen factory in Beltsville, Maryland, weaving carpets. During the Civil War the family moved to Loudoun County, where his father built Rock Bridge Woolen Mills near Lincoln.

Mr. Kephart later moved to Herndon, where he and his wife raised their family—a son, Herman, and a daughter, Mary. His home and shop were near the end of Coral Road. The exact site is now a parking lot.

Not only did Mr. Kephart weave rugs, but he also did carpentry and woodworking. He made furniture, window and door frames, well buckets, and axe handles.

Records of his business during the early 1920s and 30s still exist in the form of a ledger. It shows a bit of what life was like and how business was conducted. The ledger is a large bound book, written in pencil. Some pages deal with his purchases, but the majority deal with his woodworking business. Because people at that time had very little money, they generally ran a tab with grocery stores and other businesses. Mr. Kephart's customers were no different, often paying in goods rather than money. When you start adding up the cost for services and the payments received, Mr. Kephart seems to come out on the short end. It is hard to imagine being paid with cabbages, a sack of flour, or a roll of roofing material.

As I read through the ledger pages, I saw names of many of the individuals and businesses that make up the history of the Town. If you visit the Depot museum you can see pictures of some of these individuals and references to most of those businesses. You also can see some of Mr. Kephart's handiwork in the museum, where a bicycle frame that he made is on display.

His family still has numerous pieces of furniture that he crafted, and his talent seems to have been passed to other family members. A gavel made by his son, Herman, is in the large display case in the freight room in the Depot, and his great grandson operates a hand crafted furniture business in Chicago.

The records people keep can provide us with a wealth of knowledge and a greater understanding of our history. Mr. Kephart's records tell us who he knew and what his day-to-day activities were. They also tell us that he was a hard working and generous man.

My personal thanks to Mike Kephart for sharing his grandfather with us and allowing me to read and enjoy his records.

