Female announcer: From West Virginia Public Broadcasting.

Music.

Jim Ramsey: When I was about ten years old, I got my first glimpse of the mummies. They would be taken over to the courthouse, and the way the man would get attention of the people. He would cup his hand over his mouth and call across the street, “Have you saw the mummies? If you ain’t, come right over. Two bits, twenty five cents, one fourth of a dollar.” Well, Graham Hamrick was a, was a very unusual man, because he was part farmer and he’s also part undertaker. And he showed an interest in something the Egyptians had done and that was mummifying people. He read the Bible a lot and he became interested in preserving the bodies. Of course, there may be some connotations with the, life eternal and he was trying to make the bodies eternal by mummifying them by using a chemical. And he claims to have gotten some ideas from Genesis. But many people have read Genesis very avidly, trying to find out what the secret was but they weren’t able to do it. Even though he was an uneducated man, he was able to, to come up with this formula.

Gary Schoonover: Mr. Hamrick’s process, for the most part, was a mystery to those going even back to his time. I don’t think most folks realized at the time that Mr. Hamrick passed away that his process had been recorded. And in fact, was on record with the patent office.

Music.

JR: He began by experimenting with milk. And he would put a chemical in the milk and he discovered that the milk would keep for a year. And then of course, he began to experiment with small animals, squirrels and birds and things of that kind.

Music.

JR: And about 1888 he felt that he was really ready to see if he could mummify a body. So he went over to Weston, which is close by here, at the asylum and secured two mummies, two female mummies. And he was able to prove to the doctors – that were very dubious of whether this could be done, that the bodies in fact would last a thousand years at least.

Music.

GS: His process was specific, to say that, to avoid puncture of the intestinal organs.

Music.

GS: His instructions were to open the cavity so that any fluids within the cavity could be drained and the potassium chloride could be introduced into the cavity and left there for a period of time. And then the body had to be turned periodically to allow the drainage of any fluids that collected over that period of time. He employed what he called sublimed sulfur, which was burned in a closed container. And the gases were allowed to surround the body for extended periods. And then to treat the abdominal cavity, he used a mixture of saltpeter and water. And that, that mixture also would take up some of the sulfur gas and would increase it’s, I guess, its preservative powers. Through the absorption of the sulfur that was burning in the cabinet.

Music.

JR: We have a very poignant letter from a young girl, about seventeen years old, and she had been sent to Weston, there, by her family. And her letter was just begging some of her family to come and visit her. And obviously, it must have been unanswered because she is one of the people that Mr. Hamrick was able to pick up and mummify. So I’ve had several people who study those mummies very carefully and they tell me that this girl, about seventeen years old, appears to be from studying the skull, and that she was a very attractive and beautiful girl.

GS: Hamrick’s process could be as short or as long as a person wanted it to be. For temporary mummification, you could pursue the process for as short as a day. But although, you know I have heard no descriptions of what the body, the mummies looked like when they were first, when the process was first completed. All we know of them is what they’ve looked like for modern day. I think these mummies were the results of Mr. Hamrick’s employing the process for a matter of weeks. So we could see that the process worked.

JR: The Smithsonian Institution was interested in these mummies and told Mr. Hamrick they’d like to have the mummies. To show that, and millions and millions of people would see them. The trouble was, Mr. Hamrick, they said ‘we want the formula, because we always put up a plaque and explain to the public how the mummifying process takes place’. And he was not willing at that particular time. He said ‘you can have the bodies but you can’t have the formula because that’s a secret’. So they told him to keep the mummies. If the Smithsonian would have taken them, of course, we would never have had the Philippi mummies. We have people come who have seen the mummies, the Egyptian mummies, and have seen the mummies at the Smithsonian, and they say in both cases the mummies are always wrapped so that they’ll be preserved for thousands and thousands of years. And people are so surprised. They say these are the most naked mummies we’ve ever seen you don’t have any, no wrappings or anything on it - around them. And I say well, they were always displayed that way and of course, some people say ‘well I believe they’re deteriorating’. But speaking personally, they don’t look any different to me then they always did. And I did have an individual here who told me that he thought I should put some moth balls in there. He said it ought to keep the termites from destroying them but they seem to be indestructible.

GS: In my impression of Graham Hamrick, I don’t see him as, as a fanatic. Although, he was described as a hard-shell Baptist that this means that he was temperate in his nature. I think he wanted to see if what he was reading in the Bible, what he understood, if what he was reading in the Bible was possible. And he proved that it was.

JR: I believe it’s just the American way, that there are people that just want to take things apart and put ‘em back together and have a lively interest in things of that kind.

Music.