

CANADIAN COUPLE ASSISTING WITH ARCHIVES

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Charlie and Dixie Murray clean and repair historic Putnam County documents at the county archives office. Herald-Citizen Photo/Ty Kernea

PUTNAM COUNTY -- Charlie and Dixie Murray are getting a first-hand look at the history of Putnam County as they help clean, repair and organize records from the county's past. The two are volunteers with the Genealogical Society of Utah and have been working with counties across the state for two years to archive historical records.

"It's awesome to think about how close we can get to history," said Dixie. "We can run our fingers over the signatures of these humongous creatures of history and handle the same documents they handled.

"I've been awestruck so many times by things we have found."

The Murrays are serving through a mission of their church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They left their home in Alberta, Canada, where they had been ranchers and operated a bed and breakfast. They sold their cattle and left their children behind to serve in whatever way the church asked.

The church sent them to Tennessee.

"We received for a number of years and felt it was time to give back," Charlie said.

"The Lord blessed us," added Dixie. "We're healthy and strong. What more can you ask for."

While they both enjoy history, neither had experience in records archival until they began their work.

"We received about 20 minutes of training before we left," Dixie said. "That's because a lot of archivists have their own way of doing things. They didn't want us to be set in our ways. We've picked things up as we've gone along and found new ways, and we've learned a lot."

They have worked in Cocke County, Greene County, White County and Cannon County before coming to Putnam County.

In Putnam County, the pair have been hard at work for the past two weeks with county archivist Glenn Jones, sorting through old records from Putnam County Chancery Court.

Jones said, "They are doing a great job and are handling the documents with extreme care. It's a big job to take each record and clean it up and repair it and organize it."

So far, 18 boxes have been brought to the archives office from the Justice Center. More than 30 boxes remain. Jones said it isn't known how many more boxes of historic records are being stored in various county offices.

Each record is unfolded and cleaned, removing dirt or mold. If the paper is brittle and the document is tearing, it is repaired. It is then filed in acid-free folders. After that, the records will be indexed and put on microfilm, with the Tennessee Archives receiving a copy and a copy going to the county archives.

The Murrays said as part of the volunteer agreement, the records would also be digitized and placed on the Web site www.familysearch.org. There, the records will be available free of charge to those conducting

research.

It's difficult and time-consuming work, they said. And much of the speed in processing records depends on the shape they are in. The paper used determines much of that, Dixie said, noting older documents on paper with a higher cotton content held up very well while later records, from about 1900 and beyond, were often brittle and would fall apart when handled. But the environment they have been stored also plays a vital role.

"These are quite good," Dixie said. "Putnam County has looked after these documents. Linda Reeder [Clerk and Master] has done a great job. They are the best we have worked with."

The two have come across numerous interesting records, including old maps of the county, land grants signed by Presidents Andrew Johnson and James K. Polk, as well as documents signed by the 13 of the first 15 governors of the state. They also found a marriage license from 1883, and the oldest court documents found so far date back to 1865. Many of the older land grants were found in case files.

"There's no telling what we're going to find," Dixie said, noting in another county they found about \$700 in Confederate currency, in pristine condition. "It's like Christmas morning. It's dirty work, but it's so amazing."

Another thing the two enjoy is learning about the history of each community where they have worked, and getting to track families across the state. Dixie said many of the same names could be found in every county, and their work with the records brought more interest into the names of streets and businesses.

This will most likely be the Murray's last post before they complete their two-year mission work and return to their home in Canada. But they've enjoyed their travels and their work.

Dixie "It's a privilege to be doing this work. This is forever."

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A SPECIAL THANK YOU

A dinner was held recently at the Putnam County Archives to honor Charlie and Dixie Murray. The Murrays, from Alberta, Canada, were sent to Tennessee on a two-year mission to work with county archives and chancery court records. They had arrived in Putnam County in January. Pictured, from left in front, are Kathy Titon, Drucilla Ray, Pat Dulworth, Janet Frey, Michelle Parrott, and in the second row, Ginger Dunn, Carol Roberts, Charlie Murray, Dixie Murray, Linda Tinch, County Executive Kim Blaylock, Dennis McBroom, and in back, Darrell Beason, Scott Chadwell, Putnam County Archivist Glenn Jones, and Wayne Key. The Murrays have already returned home, but Jones said they will be missed by everyone who works and visits the archives.