

FORT BLOUNT CABIN

'Historic Cabin Hidden Away in Baxter, TN

By Megan Trotter

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BAXTER – In 1970, Clarence Sewell of Baxter got a call from his brother-in-law who lived along the Cumberland River. He'd noticed that someone was clearing some land and getting ready to bulldoze an old log cabin there, and knowing Sewell's love of historic artifacts, asked if he might be interested in it. Sewell drove up that day and bought the cabin for \$25.



He disassembled it and brought it home piece-by-piece.

(Pictured: Clarence Sewell standing in front of one of his log cabins on his property).

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“You mark (each side) with four different colors of paint,” he explained. “One dot, two dots, three

dots, four dots, and it goes right back together like it was. It's so simple.”

But back then, taking a cabin apart from one property and reassembling it on another property was not a common practice. It confused his neighbors for a time.



“Everybody thought I was putting up a pig pen,” Sewell laughed. “They didn't know what I was doing. When I got done, everybody went crazy over it.”

(Pictured: Rose Marie (Maddux) Sewell, w/o Clarence Sewell standing in front of the Fort Blount log cabin).

Sewell didn't know much about the building when he bought it and paid a man named Nelson Steward \$18 to transport it. However, now thanks to some research and help of the Putnam County Archives, Sewell has discovered that this is more than just some random log cabin. It came from Fort Blount, an outpost where Avery's Trace road crossed the river.

“It was the first road from East to Middle Tennessee,” Glenn Jones, Putnam County archivist said. “This was the frontier. This was the farthest west we were way back then.”



The land was owned by Samson Williams, who ran a ferry at the crossing and was later named the postmaster as well. The cabin is believed to have first been an inn owned by Williams, and could very well have housed Louis Phillippe, who later became King of France, as well as Andrew Jackson – both were known to have gone through this outpost.

(Pictured: Audrey J. (Denny)

Lambert sitting by the old wood stove inside one of the log cabins on the Clarence Sewell property, 2005).

(“The cabin) could have possibly been the first inn by the Cumberland River and then it became the post office. It’s very possible,” Jones said. “When he got more successful, he would have built a house and used this old building for the post office. ... Because

way back then, you’re not going to build a log house then tear it down and build a new one.”



The reason that historians believe it was later a post office is because Williamsburg-Jackson County court books were found stored upstairs.

(Pictured: Audrey J. (Denny) Lambert & Clarence Sewell at his home in Baxter, TN, 2005).

“To have the court records upstairs, it had to be an official building,” Jones said.

Unfortunately, during the transfer of the cabin to its new home, the court books disappeared. Historians are hoping to one day track them down to add them to the community’s historic archives.

Fort Blount was eventually abandoned in 1798, and Williams purchased the adjacent land. Later the county purchased 60 acres of his property to create the town of Williams

burg, which remained the county seat until Gainesboro was established. Though nothing remains of the fort today except for a cemetery, the land was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974.



Sewell says he plans to keep this, and the other small log cabins and various artifacts he's collected, at his home in Baxter for now, but has recently agreed to donate the Fort Blount cabin to the Putnam County Archives after his passing. Jones hopes to someday construct a village of historic cabins such as this one and open them up for the public to enjoy. Lloyd Harris of Harris Monuments, Suzanne Worrell of State Farm and Dean Hutson of Common Sense Publishing and publisher of "Celebrations Magazine"

and "Our Senior Times," have all pitched in as sponsors to cover the cost of moving the cabin to its new home when the time comes.

(Pictured: From left, Glenn Jones, Putnam County Archivist, Lloyd Harris of Harris Monuments and Dean Hutson of Common Sense Publishing check out the front of the historic cabin. Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN, Sun. 29 Sept. 2013).

"This is such an amazing piece of history," Jones said. "We're going to have a granite marker made to put out in front of it that says, 'Clarence Sewell: one of Putnam County's earliest preservationist.'"



The Baxter Christmas Parade and Celebration was held December 3, 2013 in Baxter, Putnam Co., TN. The theme was "Christmas from the Front Porch." Clarence Sewell was the grand marshal, and the event included model trains, exhibits, games and Santa riding in on a locomotive. Preparing the event; seated, from left, Yvonne Brunette and Marti Wagner of Baxter Beautification Committee. Standing: Mayor Jeff Wilhite; Laryssa Waller, Baxter Beautification Committee; Clarence Sewell; and Bob Wagner and Jeanie Lee, both the of the Baxter Beautification Committee.

Picture by Ty Kernea, in the Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: Tuesday, 5 November 2013, pg. A3