

## ARCHIVES SHINE SPOTLIGHT ON HISTORIC BUFFALO VALLEY

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**PUTNAM COUNTY** — In their search for “almost forgotten crossroads” of Putnam County, the Putnam County Archives has been collecting information from local residents about the Buffalo Valley Community.

Buffalo Valley is located in a valley on the western side of Putnam County. It has abundant streams, rolling hills, and large green pastures. It is near the site where the Big Indian Creek flows into the Caney Fork River. From early land records and surveys, there was much activity in this area at an early date.

David Young of Smith County bought 222 acres of land on the South Fork of Indian Creek on Nov. 11, 1803. A Jackson County map in the Putnam County Archives shows that the South Fork is named Young’s Fork in 1836, and the community is named Buffalo Valley. There was a grist mill before 1803 and a sawmill by 1812.

From old store ledgers transcribed by Audrey Denny Lambert in 2011, there must have been a church here by 1832. The earliest store ledger is Ledger D with the first date in 1832. The land entries and surveys are very informative about the early settlers of the Buffalo Valley area. They tell who bought and sold land, as well as who was living on the land.

In Walter McClain’s “1925 of History of Putnam County,” he states that long before any settlement was made, there was a huge growth of cane, and the buffalo would come down from the mountains to graze through the winter. An old tradition among early settlers was that a huge buffalo was killed in the valley; thus the valley got its name.

In 1884, Buffalo Valley was growing. It was a large river port, in which steamboats made regular trips up the Caney Fork. In 1890, the N&K Railroad was completed, and the valley continued to grow. J. T. Askew’s father, (Jeptha Tubb Askew II, born 1878) worked for the railroad while they building the lines through Buffalo Valley. He was a water boy. He was later the depot agent from 1899 to 1905.

Buffalo Valley was a prosperous center for trade, shipping, and transportation. Six freight and passenger trains came through daily. By 1925 there were four general stores, three grist mills, two blacksmith shops, a pole and timber yard, a produce dealer, and several livestock dealers.

The first Buffalo Valley Post Office that opened under the name Buffalo Valley opened on Oct. 2, 1868. The first post master was James G. Exum.

The first Buffalo Valley School was constructed in 1890 or 1891. The building was a two-story frame building with several classrooms. It was located on a site which is now part of Interstate 40, which runs through Buffalo Valley. In 1925, the Buffalo Valley

School was built as a state project, built with the standard five-teacher community floor plan.

The school doors closed in 1966.

In 2006, the school building was officially listed on the National Historic Register. A group of interested citizens from Buffalo Valley officially unveiled a historical marker, signifying the school building being placed on the Register.

The Buffalo Valley bank was established in 1912 and closed permanently in 1926. One cause of the town's decline was flooding. In 1902, a flood swept away a railroad bridge, the mill, and the post office. In 1928, a large flood wiped out most of Buffalo Valley.

Today, what remains is a post office downtown and an old school building, turned into a community center and library. At the school, which is still standing, the past is not forgotten.

According to local folk lore, the place where the new sign is erected is where Jesse James and the Younger Brothers would hang out and drink from the spring, known as the Dr. Farmer Spring; they corralled their horses in a barn across the road from the spring.

The Buffalo Valley signs were donated by Martin Medley and Reggie Shanks. Anyone with information on Buffalo Valley or who would like to pay for signs for any unincorporated community in Putnam County can contact the Archives at 931-520-0042.

\*Read more about Buffalo Valley, Putnam Co., TN & surrounding area at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>



Pictured: From left, Joe Jared, Judy Jared, Randy Porter, Carolyn Huddleston, Ben Rodgers (back), Carol Bradford, Carolyn Bates (back), Nancy Billingsley, Denelda Wilkerson (back), Carolyn Young, Ted Huddleston (back), Danny Holmes, Robert Shanks (back), Hilda Smith Jason Robert Smith (back), Jannie Christina, Joy Shanks Chadwell (back), Gina Shanks Hooper, Jim Bates (back), Reggie Shanks, Wands Shanks, Jack Williams (back), Mike Medley, Glenn Jones (back) and Martin Medley. Photo by Ty Kernea.