

SILVER POINT HAS COLORFUL ‘ALMOST FORGOTTEN’ HISTORY

Putnam Co., TN

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By Megan Trotter

The Silver point may be better known for having some of the worst weather in the county, but its reported gas-station ties to come country music royalty might surprise you.

More on that in a bit. In its search for “almost forgotten crossroads” of Putnam County Archives has been collecting information from local residents about Silver Point. The community is located near the intersections of Hwy. 141, Hwy. 56 and Interstate 40’s Exit 273.



Before the post office was established, the area was called Head of the Valley, it sat atop the hill on the Buffalo Valley Road that descended into the Buffalo Valley area.

(Pictured: Standing with the new sign to mark the location of Silver Point are, from left, Courtney Gorden, Jim Smith, Carol Pace, Ethel Sherrill, Evelyn Buck, Carol Bradford, Glenn Jones, Randy

Porter and Kathy Cusick).

When the community of Head of the Valley requested a post office in that name in 1874, it was rejected as too long.

So why Silver Point? Folklore has it that there were deposits of silver ore in the area, and the community was on a point, so the community became known as Silver Point. The first postmaster was Tyrah Roberson. The post office continues today.

The post office was known to have had several locations; the last is just south of the interstate on Hwy. 56. The community had general stores, a stone mason, a livestock dealer, a grist mill, a blacksmith shop, a cobbler, a livery stable and many churches.

At one time, P. C. Halley’s General Store housed the post office.

The blacksmith shop was run by Henry Clay. Who built wagons from the ground up. He had been a slave and later served with the Union Army during the Civil War.

In 1917, Silver Point had its own photography studio with photographer Arthur Hall.

Silver Point schools were in several sections of the community. In 1902, the Joseph Jones family donated land for a new school building. The brick school building on Hwy. 141 closed in 1968 and is now used as a community center. Down the road is the West End Church of Christ, formerly the Silver Point Christian Institute, which was established in 1909 for African-American students.

In 1890 something major happened in the community.

The N & K Railroad and its steam engines reached Silver Point on a route following the Buffalo Valley Road. With the railroad, Silver Point was opened to the whole country, so a depot was built to accommodate the passengers and freight.

In 1935, a new state highway was built from the east to the west, from Knoxville to Memphis. It took the place of Tennessee State Hwy. 24 and was called Hwy. 70. The new road, which was several miles north of Silver Point, was deemed the best and fastest way to travel the state from east to west. Trucks and travelers began using Hwy. 70, which was the cause of the decline of the railroad, and the Silver Point community.

So what's the country music connection?

In 1962, a rebirth of the Silver Point happened when I-40 was built with an exit to the community.

Clyde Clemons relocated his Gulf Station to the new exit with a nationally known design, full service, and a porcelain-clad exterior building.

As a child, Putnam County archivist Glenn Jones and his family would pass through Silver Point when traveling from Celina to visit family in Smithville.

“We would always top at the Clemons gulf Station because of the clean restrooms and the modern gas pumps,” he said.



Locals say this now-defunct gas station at the Silver Point exit on Interstate 40 was once a frequent stopping point for Nashville country music royalty like Dolly Parton and Johnny Cash.

This new exit encouraged other businesses in the area to relocate near the exit. People going to Smithville and Center Hill Lake would exit at Silver Point. Celebrities would stop and use the clean facilities at the Gulf Station.

Country music stars traveling I-40 from Nashville were seen at Silver Point refueling at the gas station and eating at the Rose Garden Restaurant.

According to Jim Smith, a lifetime resident of the area, it was a big deal when Dolly Parton visited the facilities at the Gulf Station.

He said the toilet seat was taken off and saved as a souvenir.

Johnny Cash also was said to have stopped at the Gulf Station with a flat tire; he was reportedly “three sheets to the wind.” He had no money with him, so Glenn Stewart, who worked there, fixed his flat tire anyway, with Johnny promising to pay later.

That station still stands but is empty today. Across the street, a new building was built, replacing the old Phillips 66 Station. The gas brand has changed several times. The owner of both buildings was Walter Lamb of Lamb Oil.

The unincorporated community signs were donated by Bill and Jim Smith, Tammy Tucker-no, not that country music star-and the Silver Point Community Center.

If anyone knows the origin of the name of Silver Point or anything else about the community, or anything about other “forgotten” Putnam County communities please call the Archives at (931) 520-0042.

*Read more about the History of Putnam Co., TN “Forgotten Crossroads” and surrounding areas at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>