

BOOK LOOKS AT HISTORY OF BLACKS IN THE UPPER CUMBERLAND, TN

By Jill Thomas

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History buffs have a new history of the Upper Cumberland to look forward to this summer.



Tennessee Tech History Professor Wali Kharif and Emeritus Professor of Folk Studies at Western Kentucky University William Lynwood Montell have co-authored a history of the African population in the Kentucky-Tennessee Upper Cumberland.

Using interviews with residents in 23 counties in Kentucky and Tennessee, the two professors have gathered together an oral history of African Americans in the Upper Cumberland from 1865 to 1990 titled *Reminiscences and Reflections: African Americans in the Kentucky-Tennessee Upper Cumberland since the Civil War*.

Information from Tennessee comes from individuals and families in Clay, Overton, Fentress, Jackson, Macon, Pickett, Cumberland, DeKalb, Putnam, Smith and White Counties.

“Our main focus is on the lives of African Americans since 1865. We wanted to show readers how people saw themselves, so we used oral records as well as historical documents,” said Kharif.

“I’d say about 90 percent of the information comes directly from the residents or descendants of African American residents in the area. The other 10 percent of the book contains quotes and reminiscences of what the white community thought of their African American neighbors.”

The book also contains 24 black and white vintage photos.

The book had its genesis in the interviews that both Kharif and Montell asked of their students in some of their classes.

“These interviews go back to around 1988 and about 90 percent of the interviews were done by our students. They started by interviewing black administrators and ministers, and have gone on from there,” Kharif said.

“We wanted to preserve what individuals have to say in such a way that would stimulate others to continue the research,” he said.

Both Kharif and Montell wanted a book that would appeal to both the general reading public and to academics.

“This is readable by anyone from eighth grade on up,” he said. “But we also hope a Ph.d would not be insulted by it.”

The two authors filled the book’s 270 pages with quotes from people throughout the region.

There are nine chapters, not counting a comprehensive bibliography and appendices, which cover aspects of life including: Local Black Communities, The ‘Ole’ Ways of Life, Recreation and Social Activities, Religious Beliefs and Practices, Black Schools (the largest chapter), Black Land Occupancy and Employment Opportunities and Race Relations.

The chapter on courting and marriage contains some of the most entertaining accounts including one by Hattie Oakes of Alexandria, KY, who married an “older’ man without ever having been on a date with him.

“When we married we didn’t live together at first. We courted for three weeks after we married,” she said.

But the abundance of quotes throughout the book was also the cause for its not being published by a university press.

They wanted us to take out the quotes and analyze rather than quote,” Kharif said.

The two professors took the book to two university presses: University of Tennessee and the Mercer University Press, but when both presses asked that the quotations be cut, the two authors began to investigate self-publishing.

“This is my first time around the publication world,” Kharif said. “and the first time around anything is a learning experience.”

Kharif said he was stuck by the length of time it takes to get a book published.

“Each time we sent the book off, it took from two to six months to just get an answer on whether the press would consider publishing the book. I think I prefer writing journal articles. You can focus on recent research and know quickly whether they’re going to be accepted. But them with journal articles you don’t usually get paid anything,” he said.

To order a copy of *Reminisces and Reflections: African Americans in the Kentucky-Tennessee Upper Cumberland since the Civil war* by Wali Rashash Kharif and William Lynwood Montell send a check for \$18 plus six percent Kentucky Sales Tax to Janze Publications at 930 Bargo Street, London, KY 40741. Make the check out to Wali Kharif.

Or e-mail janzepub@alltel.net for an official order form.

For more information email Kharif at wrkharif@tntech.edu

*See more history items at <http://www.ajlambert.com>

*See Cash Cemetery, virtual cemetery files.

**UPPER CUMBERLAND
CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE**
Respecting All Heritages & Points of View
Slavery & the Civil War

Speaker:
Tennessee Tech Prof. Wali Kharif

February 9, 6:30 p.m.
Cookeville First Presbyterian Church

**The Roundtable meets the second
Tuesday of each month.
Visitors Are More Than Welcome.**

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