

Historic Putnam records being archived -- in Jackson County

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It might seem like a strange place to look for it, but decades of Putnam County History can be found at the Jackson County Courthouse.

A massive effort is underway in Gainesboro to preserve and organize the court records, correspondence and other documents that tell the story of both Jackson and Putnam's early years. A quirk of history entwines the sister counties' past and led to the Putnam County records being stored at the courthouse.

On any given afternoon, you can find a team of volunteers in a small sun-splashed room on the courthouse's third floor, indexing the brittle, time-worn pages and carefully transferring them from old manila folders into acid-free sleeves meant to prolong their life.

It wasn't that way in 1989, when Jackson County archivist Glen Jones first walked into the courthouse's basement and discovered pile upon pile of records, some strewn on the floor, some covered in dirt or stained with water.

"It was unbelievable," Jones said. "There were so many records stacked up from the floor to the ceiling that you couldn't even get into the rooms."

Finally, two years ago, Jones got permission from County Executive Charlie Hicks to haul the records upstairs and begin the long process of sifting through them to figure out what they had.

"Every box had to be opened, every shelf cleaned off," he said.

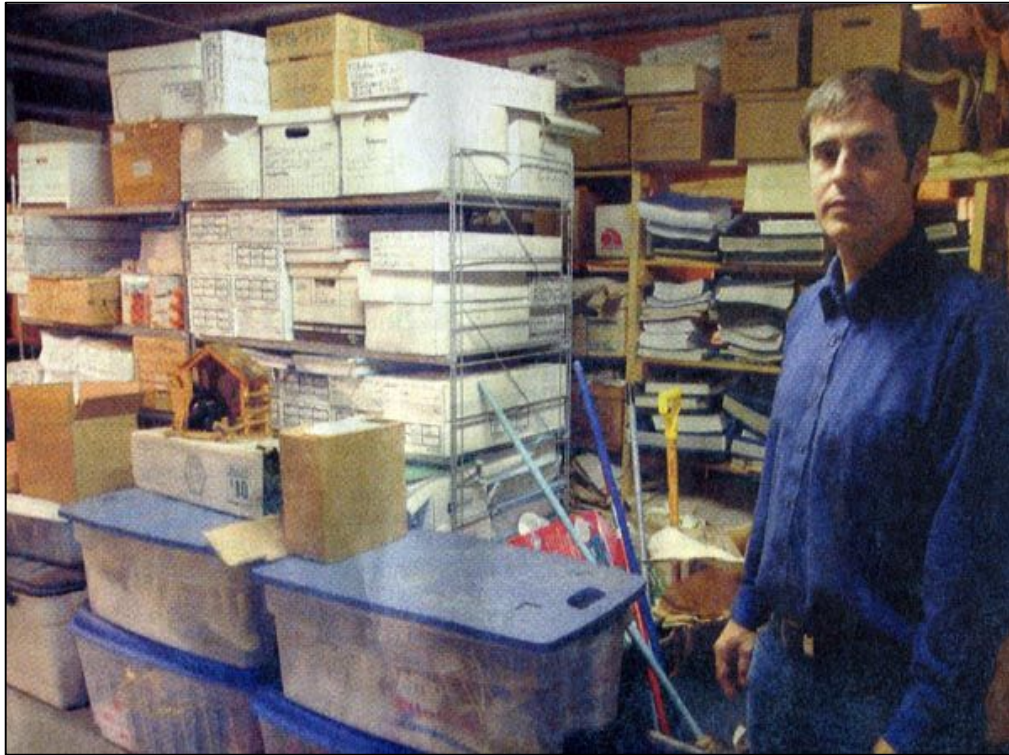
Among the divorce records, murder trial transcripts and wills were the records of a lawsuit brought in chancery court in 1852 that dissolved Putnam County and made it a part of Jackson County. Putnam had been formed in part from Jackson County lands. After the lawsuit was resolved in Jackson County's favor, the state legislature mandated that all Putnam County records then being held at Monticello, the county seat, be transferred to the Jackson County courthouse. When Putnam was reestablished in 1854, the records remained. Jackson County is also in possession of all records from Baxter, Cookeville and Buffalo Valley from 1801 to 1854, a period during which those towns were a part of Jackson County.

Jones said that the team of volunteers has only managed to go through about one-third of the records thus far, and that more of Putnam County's history should come to light as the project moves ahead.

"There's no telling how much there is," he said.

Published May 18, 2006 10:29 AM CDT: Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN

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Jackson County archivist Glen Jones in the basement of the county courthouse, where records telling the story of Putnam County's early history languished for years.

Photo by: David Baze, Herald Citizen Staff.