

PAPER REPRODUCTION FOUND (Putnam County Herald Newspaper)

Paige Stanage | Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: Posted Friday, May 24, 2019

A Cookeville couple recently found a 40-year-old reproduction of the first edition of the defunct *Putnam County Herald* newspaper inside a cedar chest of their home.

James and Joann Herron were rummaging through relics in a family cedar chest when they discovered the copy.

"We kept it in the chest after my parents passed away in 2003," Joann said. "I think that's why it's so preserved."



James said they also have other copies of the newspaper dating back to the 1940s.

The reproduction copy the Herrons own was likely created in the 1970s

The first *Putnam County Herald* was published Feb. 11, 1903 by its founder and first editor, **Elmer Wirt**. The *Putnam County Herald* and *Cookeville Citizen* merged together in 1960, and appeared under the "Herald-Citizen" nameplate in 1969.

The reproduction copy the Herrons own was likely created in the 1970s, according to *Herald-Citizen* News Editor Don Foy.

"I grew up on 7th Street in town (Cookeville)," said Joann. "And I grew up reading the paper because it's what my parents did."

Joann said she wanted to keep up the tradition of reading the paper after she was married and started her own family.

"When we were married, I told him 'We have to make sure to get the *Herald*.'"



The Herrons have been married for 52 years, and have subscribed to the *Herald-Citizen* since then.

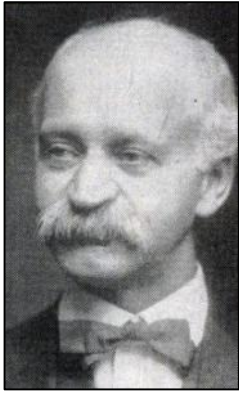
(Pictured: James and Joann Herron found a 40 year old reproduction of the first edition of the defunct

Putnam County Herald newspaper inside a cedar chest of their home).

"We can't live without the Herald," Joann said. "We got to have the paper to keep up with everything."

Putnam County Herald

Elmer Lincoln Wirt, member of the Populist Party and espouser of socialist ideals in the Upper Cumberland region of Tennessee, established the *Putnam County Herald* in 1903. Wirt had moved his family from Olmstead County, Minnesota, to Cookeville, Tennessee, in 1894. His career began hand-setting type at several newspapers in Minnesota, and in 1891 he became the publisher of the [*Farmer's Alliance*](#) in Elbow Lake, Minnesota. Two years after moving to Tennessee, Wirt started with the [*Cookeville Press*](#), and in 1903, after purchasing a prosperous job printing office from his **brother Walter Wirt**, he established the *Putnam County Herald*.



In the first issue of the *Herald*, Wirt noted that the newspaper would be "democratic, with a little 'd'." As the Populist Party in Tennessee was insignificant, Wirt usually used his paper to support Democratic candidates, and also to advance his socialist ideals. In a 1906 editorial, old his readers that "[...] socialist sentiment is rapidly increasing in all the civilized countries," and the *Herald* continued to support socialist principles for the remainder its existence. That existence was imperiled two years later when the *Herald's* plant was destroyed by fire, but the facility was soon rebuilt, and the newspaper again thrived.

By 1911, the *Herald*, which was published every Thursday by E.L. Wirt & Son Publishers, could be purchased at a discounted annual subscription rate of 25 cents, making it significantly cheaper than many newspapers of the time. Throughout the 1910s, the *Herald's* front page featured local news such as minutes from the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (Mt. View Lodge No. 179), and advertisements for local businesses often covered a large proportion of the page. Inside the newspaper were numerous letters to the editor reacting to previous days' news, as well as reports from readers in small towns around the county. The Wirts' weekly also included typical fare of a local newspaper of that era including birth notices, obituaries, and even a sports page, which was fitting for the senior Wirt, an avid baseball fan.

Although a proponent of socialist thought, E.L. Wirt ran for office on the Democratic ticket. After serving as an alderman in Cookeville, Wirt was elected to the Tennessee General Assembly in 1914-15. During his term, Wirt authored the bill to create the Tennessee Polytechnic Institute, which later became Tennessee Tech University. In later years, his political career waned when he failed to obtain the Democratic nomination for governor in 1920.

In the mid-1920s, the *Herald* was published as the [*Semi-weekly Putnam County Herald*](#). It remained in operation until 1927, when Wirt sold the paper to the Cookeville Print Company. The *Herald* merged with the [*Upper Cumberland News*](#) to form the [*Putnam County Herald and Upper Cumberland News*](#) before reverting to its original name, the [*Putnam County Herald*](#). In 1969, the *Herald* joined the [*Cookeville Citizen*](#) to form the [*Cookeville Herald-Citizen*](#), which remains in existence in the 21st century as the [*Herald-Citizen*](#).

Provided by: [*University of Tennessee*](#)

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