

HISTORY MUSEUM GETS POSTCARDS FROM PUTNAM'S PAST

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COOKEVILLE – Judy Duke never knows what interesting things will come her way. As the City of Cookeville’s administrator of museums, she’s had her hands on plenty of historically rich items from the area, the most recent being a collection of antique postcards – which makes her wonder what other surprises are yet to befall the Cookeville History Museum and Cookeville Depot.

“I’m sure there are lost of people in this community who have things in their attics, basements or storage building,” Duke said.



But not just any old thing will do.

“It needs to have some significance

to it,” she said. “Something from Putnam County’s history they would like to share.”

(Pictured: These vintage postcards are just a sampling of the hundreds donated to the Cookeville History Museum depicting scenes from Putnam County’s past. They include Monterey Main Street in 1913; Monterey High School in 1913; a young couple from 1915; Bloomington Springs bowling alley in 1907; and Hidden Hollow Park. Photo by Amy Davis, Herald-Citizen Staff).

Something like the postcards that were donated to the museum by Tennessee historian Ridley Wills II of Nashville.

“I got a call from Dr. Sam Glasgow of Cookeville a bit back, who told me he had a friend in the Nashville area who had collected postcards for many years and that he wanted me to meet him – that he had postcards from Cookeville and Putnam County,” Duke said.

Upon that meeting with Wills – who attended high school with Glasgow at Montgomery Bell Academy – Duke was shown his book, “Touring Tennessee: A Postcard Panorama, 1898-1955.” Which was published in 1996 but is now out of print.

The book features postcards Wills collected for more than three decades, depicting images of people, places and events that have been part of Tennessee experience.

“It was really quite interesting,” Duke said. “He has hundreds and hundreds of postcards.”

Nearly 13,000 in all, it turns out – many of them from the Putnam County area.

“I was blown out of the water because a lot of them I had not seen,” Duke said. “There are churches, homes, hotels, main streets and people – Putnam County is all through there.”

“They’re ours, Duke said. “Now that Mr. Wills is in his later years, he has been giving his postcards to the areas they came from.”

And they’re “fabulous,” she said.

“These are scenes you don’t see anymore,” said Duke, picking up one of the postcards. “Like, I remember this – Southern Motel. It’s still in existence, but it doesn’t look a thing like that now. It’s been turned into private apartments. I can remember that from when I was just a little girl.” Another one: “This was U. S. 70, going up to Crossville in 1953. But there are some that go way, way back.”

Duke said some postcards will eventually be displayed, most likely in the next year, after they are cataloged and archived.

“It really is a fabulous collection,” she said. “You can get a thumbnail history of Cookeville – the whole state, actually – by looking at some of these postcards.”

But the main point, Duke said, is that Wills was willing to share his treasures – “these wonderful scenes from a time gone by” – with the museum.

She hopes others will do the same.

If someone has something they believe would be of interest to the Cookeville History and Depot museums, Duke said she’d be happy to consider the donation and may be reached at (931) 520-5455.

“We would love to have it,” she said.

The Cookeville History Museum is open Wednesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., while the Cookeville Depot is open Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

*Read more about the History of Putnam Co., TN at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>