

## **IMPORTANT TO PRESERVE COUNTY RECORDS**

By Kim Blaylock, Putnam County Executive  
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The preservation of the county's records is important for a number of reasons. By law, many of the records generated by the county must be maintained forever. In addition to legal, fiscal and administrative reasons, our records preserved the history of our county and its citizens.



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During the 1950s and 60s the federal government and many states, including Tennessee, passed laws to ensure that citizens would have ample access to public records. In 1959, the Tennessee Legislature passed a law that allowed counties to create a public records commission. In 1994, the legislation was amended to make it "mandatory" for every county in the state to create a public records commission.

By stature, the county public records commission must consist of at least six members. It is composed of one county commissioner, a judge of one of the courts and a genealogist who are appointed by the county executive and confirmed by the county commission. The county clerk, register of deeds and the county historian serve by virtue of position. If the county has an archivist, the archivist also serves on the public records commission. The group is required to meet at least two times per years.

The primary function of the public records commission is to determine the disposition of the records in the county. Should they be kept or destroyed? The public records commission is the ultimate authority regarding the preservation or destruction of public records.

Subsequent to taking office in 2001, it was brought to my attention that Putnam County had never complied with the law and established a public records commission. In 2008, I approached the county commission and recommended the establishment of the Putnam County Records Commission and the Putnam County Archives/Veterans Hall. The formation of a veterans hall to honor Putnam County Veterans seemed a natural fit with the archives because our veterans are such an important part of our history.

Since the formation of the public records commission and archives, literally tons of unneeded records have been destroyed freeing up much needed space in our county buildings. Many of our older records have been properly preserved, indexed and secured. Others are still being kept by the individual office holders because of a lack of space in the archives.

State stature allows counties of collect a records management fee. The county can set it in an amount not to exceed \$5 per document. When the archives was established, Putnam County adopted this fee, and set it at \$2 per document. The fee is paid by the

person creating the document and the need for its preservation. The total expenditure budget this year for the archives/veterans hall is \$75,000 and is funded by the records management fee, state grants and donations. Everything in the veterans hall is donated or paid for by individuals.

The public records commission and the Putnam County Archives/Veterans Hall play an important role in preserving our records and the history of our county. Whether you need a record for your social security, court case, research or genealogy, it is important that you be able to find that record. The archives is located at 121B South Dixie Avenue in Cookeville, TN. If you have any questions, feel free to call (931) 520-0042.

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