

## US 70 MEMORIALIZES HISTORIAN

Mary Jo Denton  
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**PUTNAM COUNTY** -- Maurine Ensor Patton, the county's historian who died last February, will never be forgotten by her many friends and admirers. But all Putnam Countians will also be reminded of her when they drive Highway 70 in the Gentry community.



Putnam County, Tennessee, October 2009

Through the efforts of Patton's old friends, JB Leftwich and Dr. Bill Shipley, that portion of the highway has been named Maurine Ensor Patton Memorial Highway, honoring the woman who contributed so much to education here in a long teaching career and to preserving the history of this area through her research, her meticulous records of genealogy, her books, and her generous support of various causes.

Leftwich, now a retired journalist, grew up with Maurine Ensor in the Gentry community, attending school with her at Gentry Elementary. Like her, he saw the beauty and everlasting value in the simple country life. After her death at the age of 92, Leftwich looked for a way to honor her, and he asked the help of another longtime friend, Dr. Bill Shipley, who turned to Putnam County Executive Kim Blaylock, State Senator Charlotte Burks, and Representative Henry Fincher. The legislators passed a bill naming the Gentry community segment of Highway 70 in Patton's honor. In honor of her, Leftwich has also written a memoir,

published here today, which vividly shows this remarkable woman in her youth as a resident of the Gentry community.

### A NEW NAME AND A FRIENDSHIP THAT WAS

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**By J B LEFTWICH**  
**Special to the HERALD-CITIZEN**

In an era when transportation to a large extent was horse powered, families in the Putnam County hill



country could live in valleys separated by only a few miles yet never become acquainted with each other. Such were the conditions with my family and the family of Maurine Ensor. We discovered each other on a school bus that ran from Buffalo Valley to Baxter Seminary, a high school attended by pupils from the western part of the county in the early Thirties of the last century.

(Pictured: Local officials gather near a sign designating a portion of US 70 in Putnam County in honor of Maurine Ensor Patton,

Putnam County historian who died last year. From left are: Calvin Dickinson of Friends of the Cookeville History Museum; Lynda Leftwich Newton; State Rep. Henry Fincher; Mike Birdwell and Bill Shipley

FCHM; J. B. Leftwich, a lifelong friend of Patton who initiated the designation process; Judy Duke, administrator of museums for City of Cookeville; and County Executive Kim Blaylock).

I was a fuzzy-faced lad age 14 and she was a mature girl nearing college age. The difference in our teen ages in those years usually did not provide fertile ground for a close friendship, and such would have been the case with us except for a quality in Maurine that made her a favorite of all ages and brought us together



in a bond that disregarded the age disparity. On the school bus, she was my seatmate. We became friends because of a dialogue that developed as a consequence of her understanding my need of an older peer in those developing years. She was my go-to friend who innately understood an immature boy just beginning to develop thoughts in a more mature range. She was my counselor whose insights often steered me away from immature thinking or, in some cases, endorsed ideas she thought needed developing. She was



amused that I was interested in crossword puzzles, even to the extent of concocting my own puzzles, which pleased her and gained her endorsement and help.

The beauty of this dark-haired girl with the quick smile and warm disposition was not lost on the older boys. She became one of the most popular girls on campus all the while puffing my ego because she bestowed on me a confidence-building mode this adolescent needed. Our friendship was placed on hold after she graduated, attended different colleges, and we went our separate ways. Quite suddenly, after more than half of a century, we renewed our friendship in a happening due largely to Bill Shipley, her neighbor and my former student at Castle Heights Military Academy, who brought Maurine along for a luncheon engagement in Lebanon.

(Pictured: L to R: Maurine Ensor Patton and J. B. Leftwich)

She and I forgot the good manners our Putnam County parents taught us and ignored the other diners as we shared old memories. Her life of service to her community has been chronicled in this newspaper and by her many friends. Perhaps her signature achievement was documentation of the graves in Putnam County cemeteries. She wrote a book, documenting the customs and mores of the years between the world wars as she grew up on her family farm in the Gentry Community. The segment of a road in that community that now bears her name is a fitting tribute. It was my good fortune to toss this idea to Bill Shipley who took it and ran with it, contacted proper authorities, and nursed it into reality.

Maurine Ensor Patton, in the latter years of her life, wrote a book on growing up in Putnam County. Upon reading it, I wrote: "As I read, I thought of our school days friendship and how you kinda shepherded me along. You were the big sister I never had, and ours was a distinctive and endearing friendship. We, my wife and I, in our farm-life childhoods had many of the experiences you had and recorded in your book. Each of us slept on pallets, helped with hog killing, ran from ganders and drank baking soda water to ease indigestion. I played one-eyed cat, swung on grapevines, gathered wild grapes, trapped possums and skunks, and sold eggs to buy pencils."

That her life and my life intersected for a brief interval was one of my most pleasant adolescent experiences.

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\*See other stories by J. B. Leftwich & Maurine Ensor Patton at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>



Maurine Ensor Patton, at left, presents a copy of her recently published 'Putnam County Tennessee Cemeteries' to Reilly Reagan, director of the Putnam County Library. The hardbound book contains 716 pages and lists 55,000 entries from 344 cemeteries and private graveyards here. Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, 1995.

