

FORGOTTEN CROSSROADS:

By Megan Trotter: Herald-Citizen Staff

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PUTNAM COUNTY -- As the Putnam County Archives continues its research into the "almost forgotten" communities of the area, this week they are turning to the Pippin community.

The Pippin community was named for Joseph Pippin, who was born in 1764 and came to Tennessee in the



1800s as a long hunter from Edgecombe County in North Carolina. He and six other families -- Slagle, Swearingin, Lawson, Finn, Stafford and Woodford -- came across the Cumberland Mountains and settled in Blackburn's Fork.

(Pictured: The old Pippin School housed the area's children up through 8th grade).

One of the most prominent features of the community was the school that

taught students in first through eighth grade. Christine Jones of Cookeville taught at the school during the 1943-44 school year and was principal the following year. That first year, she was the only teacher for all eight grades, teaching a total of around 60 children.

"That first year I lost 10 pounds, and I should have lost 20," she chuckled. "I worked myself to death, I really did. When I gave them a test, I gave them their papers back graded. They'd want to know (their results) the next day. And you know, when I was in school, I did, too, so why should I drag it out and give it to them five days later?"

Her second year, she worked with Zola Wiggins and divided the grades between them.

"The most interesting thing that happened while I was teaching school down there was during one of those years, the United States Army did maneuvers," Jones said. "And during that year that they did maneuvers, where did they settle down at night? Next to the school house. It was a great interruption in our day."

At first the children wanted to talk to and wave to the men during the day, and the teachers had some issues with the men camping so close to the school. However, they soon got things worked out. The soldiers ended up offering to clean the yard of the school and even occasionally helped children who shouted out questions about their school work.

Jones' students especially enjoyed listening to special speakers and the occasions when they cooked meals at the school. Jones initiated the school lunch events where the eighth grade girls would cook the meal while the boys minded the stove. That first meal, she remembers was tomato soup with crackers and milk. The students enjoyed the experience so much, she repeated it as often as she could.

Jones later went on to Tennessee Polytechnic Institute -- later renamed Tennessee Tech University -- where she taught library science for more than 40 years.

Ira B. Cowan also went to Pippin School, but as a student, not a teacher. He has memories of he and the other kids being barefoot and their feet turning black from the oil that was put on the wooden floors of the school. His aunt, Mattie Wilhite, taught there in the 1930s, and she and her husband, Nonda, lived in the sandstone house, which they built at First Street and Washington Avenue.

According to a newspaper clipping, in 1940, the best speller in the nation was 14-year-old Laurel

Kuykendall, a Putnam County girl, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Simon Kuykendall of the Pippin community. It took 69 rounds for Kuykendall to beat a New Jersey girl who misspelled the word "plantain." Kuykendall is quoted as saying her spelling skills are in a large part due to her father, a former teacher and member of the Putnam Quarterly Court, who coached her regularly. Her winning plaque hung in the old Pippin School building, just inside the front door.

In 1998, a memorial stone to the community's founder was erected and dedicated by descendants through the efforts of Marvin Huddleston.

The Putnam County Archives wants to thank Jones for her contribution to enable the purchase of the signs for the Pippin community. Anyone with further information on the Pippin community or other local "forgotten" communities in Putnam County can contact the archives at 520-0042.

Signs are being purchased to set up around these local communities. Those interested in donating to the fund to purchase signs for their community can contact the Putnam County Archives at the phone number above.

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



Celebrating the new Pippin community sign are, from left, Glenn Jones, Putnam County Archivist; Chris Goss, Jeff Tollett and Ruby Howell, archivist volunteers; Kim Blaylock, county executive; Christine Spivey Jones, former principal at Pippin school; Carol Bradford, assistant archivist; and Betty Stark, volunteer. Photo by: Ty Kernea

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