

SIGN INSTALLED TO MARK HISTORIC BILBREY STATION

“Forgotten Crossroads”

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MONTEREY – Signs were recently installed at Bilbrey Station in Monterey to mark the historic location of the train stop.

The Bilbrey Community lies approximately 12 miles east of the Putnam County Courthouse on the Woodcliff Road that connects Algood to Monterey. A station house was built a little east of where the overhead bridge crosses the railroad. That bridge has long had a reputation for being haunted and is known as Crazy George’s Bridge.

Putnam County Archivist Glenn Jones remembered an unusual occurrence he witnessed at the spot back in the 1980s.

He was driving a friend home to Monterey on Halloween night at about 1 a.m. and came up to the bridge where it crossed over the railroad tracks. He paused when he saw that the end plank on the tracks was flipped up and raised over, exposing the spikes.

“We got out of the car and turned the big board over at an angle and drove upon the bridge,” Jones said. “I thought the grader must have hit the end plank and flipped it up when the road was graded. When we drove to the middle of the bridge, the bridge dropped a foot, and the car bottomed out. I started to gun it but had to stop because the board on the other end was also turned up, and the spikes were sticking up.”

They turned that board back over, drove over the bridge and delivered his friend home. Jones decided to get back to his own home by way of the interstate.

“The next morning, while at work, I heard on the radio the sheriff saying that someone had blown up Crazy George’s Bridge the night before,” Jones said. “I knew we were the first ones to cross over it after the explosion because we had to turn over the raised boards. They condemned it that morning, closed it and later built a new concrete bridge that replaced the old wooden one.

“I always heard that the old bridge was haunted by Crazy George, and that night it lived up to its reputation when it dropped a foot.”

Other than the “haunted” bridge, the community also held a post office that was opened on July 7, 1902, with postmaster Simeon Cannon. The postal service ran until it was discontinued in 1912. Woodcliff Road runs along a ridge up to Monterey, and the railroad was built next to it in 1890. Historians believe that some of the road follows the same path as the Avery Trace, the first road built in the state of Tennessee, and the Walton Road, built in 1801.

Today there is nothing left of the station house and the stores, but passers-by can tell where the station was along the tracks. Now the Bilbrey Station signs will pin-point the once important railroad stop in the Bilbrey Community.

According to county historian, Dale Welch, the small station was built at the 104.1 railroad mile marker. Arliss Bilbrey said that his father, Boyd Bilbrey, grew up in the community.

“My dad helped Mr. Stamps, the night watchman, at the cut below the overhead bridge,” Arliss Bilbrey said. “It was so cold one night that Mr. Stamps signaled the train that he thought he heard falling rock. So, they slowed and he road the cow catcher on the front of the engine, while dad slipped up on the cars and threw off coal, enough to keep them warm.”



(Pictured: Celebrating the historic sign for Bilbrey Station are, from left, Glenn Jones, Putnam County Archivist; Dale Welch; Carol Bradford; Jo Sampley; Jerry Sampley, Arlis Bilbrey, David Sampley and Nancy Staup. Photo by Ty Kernea).

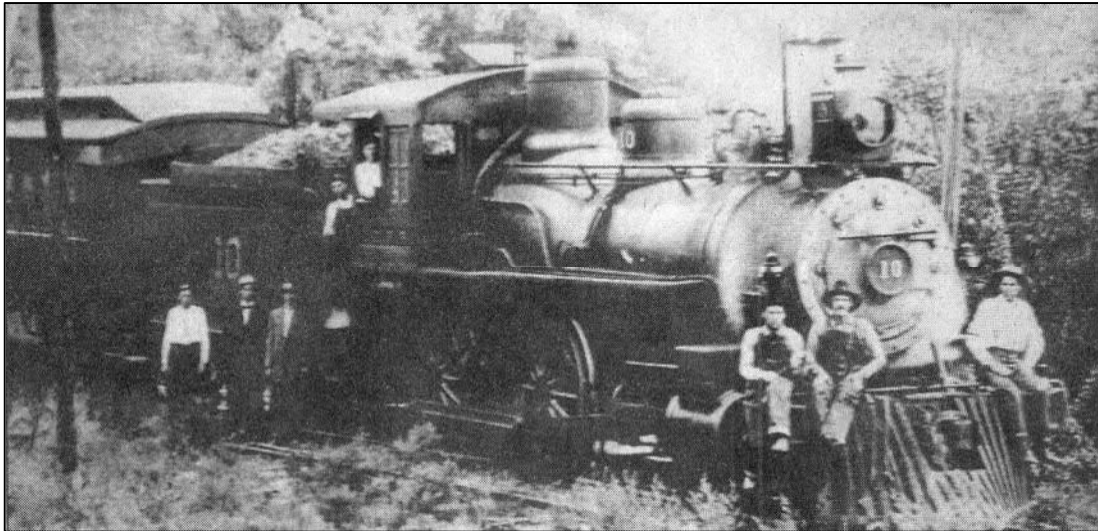
According to Welch, the Henry family was one of, if not the first, to open up a store at Bilbrey Station.

“The John Morgan Henry family returned from Oklahoma,” Jerry Sampley, a family descendant, said. “Morgan and his son pooled their money together to open the store. I have some writing from my Aunt Velma that said she was born at Bilbrey on Jan. 1, 1915. She had a brother born there a couple years later.”

Welch added, “The station and store were a happening place. One could buy a dress, overalls, horseshoes, and even catch the train.”

Around 1949 a young Billy Ford recalled helping his grandfather, Henry Dillard Welch, make whiskey and sell it to the railroad workers who would take the whiskey to Nashville and sell the whiskey to Nashville and sell it. As an adult, Ford later became a Tennessee State Trooper and a TBI agent.

Ford recalled that the train would run slowly up the mountain. “Pappy and I would catch a hold and ride the train to Monterey,” he said.



(Pictured: A train stops at the Bilbrey Station in this vintage photo).

He said they would have to buy a ticket on the way back because it traveled too fast down hill to just jump off. Some of the last caretakers of the Bilbrey Station were the Hal Phillips family, and then the Roy Williams family. In the 1950s the station wasn't needed anymore and was eventually torn down.

The signs were donated by Arlis Bilbrey and Jerry Sampley. Anyone who has information or pictures about the Bilbrey Station Community can send them to the Archives or stop by, and they can be scanned and returned. The Archives is located 12 B South Dixie Ave. in Cookeville. For more information, call (931) 520-0042.

*Read more at “Forgotten Crossroads” at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>