

**DEMOLISHED HOME TURNS OUT
TO BE OLD SCHOOL HOUSE**

By Megan Trotter
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"Forgotten Crossroads"
'Gentry Community'

PUTNAM COUNTY – In continuing their research into the "Forgotten Communities: of Putnam County, the Putnam County Archives staff is focusing this week on the Gentry community.

This community is located on a high ridge near the Stanton Road and Little Indian Creek Road intersections, overlooking Buffalo Valley, on Highway 70, which used to be the Walton Road – one of the first roads built in the state of Tennessee. According to the archive staff's research, it was a man named Gentry who brought the town of Frog Pond and renamed it after himself.

Archivist Glenn Jones stumbled onto a piece of history from this town about 20 years ago when driving by an old house off of Highway 70 that had been partially torn down. Though it had been used as a home for some time, before that Jones knew it had been New Salem School, which opened back in 1913.

"This woman owned the property and they were having the building torn down because it was starting to get in bad shape," he said. "So I stopped and asked what they were going to do with the old school building."

It turned out that the person who had started the work of tearing down the building had decided they did not want to finish, so Jones offered to do the rest of the work himself if he could keep the wood. The home owner agreed and Jones got to work.

"When I was tearing it down, I could tell that the pieces had (previously) been nailed together another way," he said. "The nails were in different spots and there were holes. You could tell it was used somewhere else."

When he asked the home owner about it, she told him she had heard that the wood had come from the old Frog Pond School in Gentry. Some research led him to former school teacher Maurine Patton who was able to confirm that the wood had originally come from the school in Gentry. The wood from the school is currently stored in the home of Jones' mother in Baxter, where he hopes to keep it until he finds enough space to rebuild the structure as a tourist attraction.

Today, a brick school building sits just past Little Indian Creek Road. This school was built in 1934 by the Works Progress Administration and now serves the area as a community center on the western end of Putnam County.

Other than the school, the community of Gentry was also home of the post office, which opened July 14, 1894 with Lewis T. Leftwich as the first postmaster. When the postal service was moved to Baxter on July 31, 1907, Charter F. McCaleb took over the postmaster position.

Charter Franklin Napoleon McCaleb, known as "Uncle Pony," was sheriff of Putnam County from 1894 to 1896, and according to the archives, he was the only Republican sheriff ever elected in Putnam County. He had a farm in Gentry, according to reports from Ann Jared, but he moved to the jail while he was sheriff.

Pleasant Grove Methodist Church was organized in 1815. Carol Bradford, archives staff, reported that her great-great-grandfather, John Boyd, and his son, Ephraim, donated the land for the church. It was first called Rock Spring Episcopal Methodist Church because of the large spring that flowed through a crevice between two big rocks at the head of Rock Spring Valley. After several years of holding a series of two-week camp meetings, the people decided to build a church house. The first church was completed in 1832

and was also used as a school house. The name of the church was changed to Pleasant Grove because of a grove of large beech trees nearby.

Just past Little Indian Creek Road on the left is the beautiful brick school building built in 1934 by the WPA. It is no longer a school but serves the area as a community center on the western end of Putnam County.

The Putnam County Archives thanks Cindy Bellis and family at Bellis Concrete for donating the Gentry Community signs.

Those with more information to add about Gentry or any other old community of Putnam County should contact Putnam County Archives/Veterans Hall at (931) 520-0042.

*Read more "Forgotten Crossroads" about Putnam Co., TN at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>



Celebrating the new Gentry sign are, from left, Glenn Jones, Putnam County archivist; Dee Lowe, Mackenzie Hicks, Eris Bryant, county commissioner/archivist board member; Kim Blaylock, county executive/archivist board member; Fred and Cindy Bellis; Bob and Chayton Hicks; Sue Neal, county commissioner; Janette Hicks; Carol Bradford with Putnam County Archives; Leign Ann and Tyler Hughes; and Simon Brown. Photo by Ty Kernea.

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