

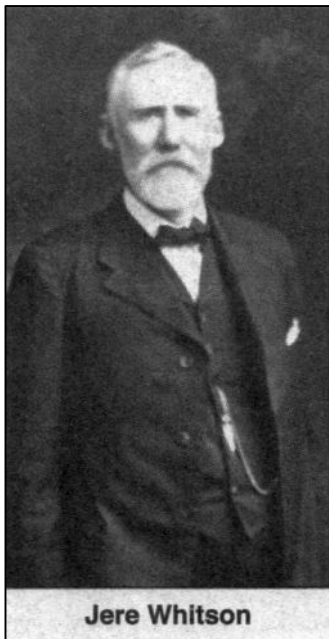
HISTORY MUSEUM CELEBRATES JERE WHITSON

by Amy Davis



Judy Duke, Cookeville museums administrator, left, and Beth Thompson, historical arts assistant, admire an antique buggy that is part of a new exhibit — “Jere Whitson Hardware: Equipping a Generation” — which opens Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. at the Cookeville History Museum. Amy Davis | Herald-Citizen

COOKEVILLE — A school and even a funeral home bear his name.



More than a century ago, a hardware store did, too.

And that well-known Cookeville name — Jere Whitson — will be celebrated by the Cookeville History Museum with the opening of a new exhibit Tuesday at 6:30 p.m.

The exhibit, entitled “Jere Whitson Hardware: Equipping a Generation,” will showcase the man — a prominent community leader and business man of his day— who left his mark in history after making Cookeville his permanent home in 1890.

“Jere Whitson and his family equipped a whole generation of Cookevillians,” Judy Duke, administrator of Cookeville museums, said, referring to the hardware and dry goods stores his family operated through the late 1800s and early 1900s.

In addition to running his store, Whitson had either owned or operated a bank, grocery store, lumberyard, gristmill, livery stable and funeral home during his lifetime. He was also active in school and charitable affairs and was a member of the Church of Christ. He even had a hand in the early days of Dixie College, having served as chairman of the board of directors for the school that was to become Tennessee Tech University.

“It’s not so much the man we’re honoring as it is his influence in the community,” Duke said.

The idea for the exhibit came after Duke was contacted last year by a Mt. Juliet family who said they had a buggy the museum might be interested in buying— a buggy with a small plaque on the back that says “Jere Whitson Hardware, Cookeville, Tenn.”

The one-horse buggy, with its spindly wheels and peeling black paint, dates back to 1910.

“My heart just turned upside down,” Duke said. “I thought, ‘Oh, how fabulous!’”

Since that time, the buggy had been in storage — but not anymore.

“It’s been moved into the museum, and it takes up all of one side of the front room,” Duke said. “It’s a one-horse buggy, but it’s still big.”

In addition to the buggy, the exhibit will feature items that would have been sold in the stores operated by Whitson and later his sons.

“We had other things from the Jere Whitson Hardware store that people had donated over the years as a gift to the museum,” Duke said.

“I’m hoping people can see what Cookeville would have looked like in the late 1800s and early 1900s and on up through the century. The Whitsons sold everything from clocks to lamps to dishes to caskets— the whole nine yards. They were meeting and equipping Cookevillians.”

She welcomes members of the community to enjoy refreshments at the exhibit opening on Tuesday.

The museum is open Wednesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at 40 E. Broad St.

The new exhibit will continue through July 13. For more information, call 520-5455.

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