

LARRY MABRY

A piece of history: Artifact collector gears up for Sunday show
by Amy Davis

Avid artifact collector Larry Mabry of Jackson County shows one of his prized pieces —



an ancient enterline clovis point that was found in Overton County. Mabry and dozens of other collectors are gearing up for the 35th Indian Artifact Show this Sunday from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Baxter Elementary School. Admission is free. Ty Kernea | Herald-Citizen BAXTER —

At first glance, it may look like an ordinary rock.

But look closer.

Notice the pointed tip. Feel the jagged edges. Then realize you may be holding something special — something crafted in ancient times for a purpose.

Treasure.

Larry Mabry of Jackson County sure feels that way.

And when he sees a peculiar pattern poking out from some freshly turned dirt — a stone that hasn't been seen in centuries — he gets a thrill like no other.

It's a love that goes back to his boyhood.

"I got started in this hobby probably around 1956," he said of his collection of artifacts. "I was just finding them."

Because no one else was willing to share.

"All my kinfolk had been picking them up before I was born," he said. "I saw what they had, but they didn't want to give them to me. They told me: 'Find your own.'"

So he did.



At age 10, he found his first paleo-era point — the oldest point type in this area, he said — while helping his uncle clear farmland in Jackson County. A bulldozer had unearthed the artifact, breaking it in the process, but Mabry has prized it ever since.

“That is what actually got me

into buying,” he said, noting that he spent many a year looking for a whole piece of the same sort.

(Pictured: Jackson County’s Larry Mabry shows a part of his vast collection of artifacts, which includes everything from arrowheads to stone tools and game pieces).

Today his collection — which includes artifacts both found and purchased — has grown to more than 10,000 pieces, everything from arrowheads to a variety of tools and game pieces like stone marbles.

Many of them he keeps framed in glass-top boxes, proudly displaying his prized possessions.

Protecting the history there.

He’s also an avid reader with more than 2,000 books on the subject and is a member of the Central States Archaeological Society.

But Mabry — as well as others in his group — is not one to keep knowledge to himself.

In fact, he’s anxious to share stories of his discoveries and his love of the hunt.

That’s why he’s hoping for plenty of visitors come Sunday, when he and dozens of other collectors will be showing their artifacts at the Volunteer State Archaeology Society of Tennessee’s 35th Indian Artifact Show at Baxter Elementary School.

The free-admission show is from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., and offers visitors an opportunity to learn about history and perhaps take a piece of it home with them, as many artifacts will be for sale.

“There have been as many as 70 (collectors) with tables for displaying,” Mabry said, noting that it’s the oldest show of its kind in Tennessee.

“They’ll come from Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Kentucky, Indiana, Missouri and all around this area.”

Native American artifacts, Civil War artifacts, coins, old bottles, fossils and fur trade items will be displayed, and books on most of these subjects will be for sale.

Visitors may even bring some of their own artifacts to find out more about them or have them appraised and authenticated.

“This show is about trying to get folks involved and coming out to see them,” he said. “We don’t charge for educating them.”

Mabry said this area is especially rich in artifacts.

“There aren’t many places in this great state that don’t have a prehistoric Indian site,” he said.

“They stayed in this area, which had plenty of game, nuts, fish to catch and things to survive with.”

He noted that it’s getting harder to find them though.

“There aren’t many places in today’s world where you can go out to hunt,” he said. “You’ve got laws for everything.”

Same goes for artifacts.

“You can hunt on land that you own in Tennessee or a friends’ land,” he said.

Not only does Mabry enjoy collecting artifacts, he also makes replicas through a process called flint knapping.

Every Monday, he and some fellow collectors meet at the home of Dennis Burgess, president of the Volunteer State Archaeology Society and charter member of the Central States Archaeology Society, to try their hand at the techniques mastered centuries ago by their ancestors for survival.

“It’s a culture that belongs to everybody,” Mabry said. “We’re all products of people who

survived with stone tool technology.”

For more information about Sunday’s artifact show, call Burgess at 261-8323.

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: 2 November 2013

ARTIFACT COLLECTORS WELCOME ENTHUSIASTS TO SUNDAY SHOW

BAXTER — Larry Mabry of Jackson County loves everything about ancient native artifacts.

Loves collecting them, reading about them and especially talking about them — which he’ll have an opportunity to do in a big way this Sunday. That’s when he and a host of others like him will be displaying their treasures at the Volunteer State Archeological Society of Tennessee’s 36th Indian Artifact Show at Baxter Elementary School.



“They’re America’s oldest collectibles,” he said. “They truly are.”

While many of the pieces were crafted from stone, featuring pointed tips and jagged edges useful for hunting, Mabry said they’re “more than just a rock.”

“They represent people who walked the same area you do,

who lived here under tedious conditions,” he said. “However, they had everything they wanted and needed. They had sources to sustain their life — plenty of food, shelter, trees, fish and anything else.”

For collectors like Mabry, the free-admission artifact show will be a time to share stories of prehistoric discoveries and the love of the hunt. Anyone interested can show up between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m. at the school, located at 125 Elmore Town Road.

“Upwards of 50 collectors will be displaying,” Mabry said.

“We’ve had people at this show from as far away as Florida, Mississippi and Alabama — all the surrounding states.”

He and his archeological society friends are anxious to show off their rare finds and educate the next generation of artifact enthusiasts.

Mabry himself has a collection of more than 10,000 pieces — everything from arrowheads to a variety of tools and game pieces like stone marbles — starting with a broken paleozoic-era point he unearthed at age 10 while helping his uncle clear farmland in Jackson County.

He said the Upper Cumberland is rich of such artifacts.

“Not all of them are pristine, but artifacts are still being found,” he said. “In reality, there are probably more in the ground than has ever been found because of the number of people who made, used and left these things behind.”

Each piece is one-of-a-kind.

“They’re not mass-produced,” Mabry said. “Even if one individual made all of these, they’re still unique to themselves.”

But finding them isn’t as easy as it once was.

“Nowadays, it’s hard to legally find a place to pick them up,” Mabry said. “It basically has to be done on private land or with permission from the landowner.”

Visitors at the show can expect to see a variety of artifacts, everything from points to pottery to bone tools as well as some Civil War artifacts, coins, old bottles, fossils and fur trade items. Plenty of books will be available too.

Those with artifacts of their own are encouraged to bring them by to learn more about them or have them appraised and authenticated.

“It’s truly for the benefit of anybody,” said Mabry, noting that Sunday’s event is the longest continuing show of its kind in the state.

“There will be people there with knowledge to answer questions on a particular artifact.”

Those with more questions about the show can call Dennis Burgess, president of the Volunteer State Archeological Society of Tennessee, at 261-8323.

Mabry added, “What I hope they would gain from this event is knowledge of the people who lived in this area who were the first people — absolutely the first people — to ever be in Tennessee.”

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: 29 October 2014

*Read more at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>