

OLD BUCK MOUNTAIN HOTEL REDISCOVERED

by Megan Trotter
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COOKEVILLE -- In the Putnam County Archives' quest to learn more about the past of Putnam County, archivist Glenn Jones and his staff turned to legends of the Buck Mountain Hotel that historians and locals say was located off of what is now Buck Mountain Road.

According to an article printed in the Herald-Citizen in 1974, the hotel was an old tavern that existed in the 1800s that was thought to be a house of "ill repute." A rough bunch apparently resided there -- thieves, prostitutes and murderers -- and rumors of innocent visitors mysteriously disappearing circled the local



area. There was even talk of a cave south of the area where parts from wagons, buggies and surries were thrown after their owners disappeared.

Gary Shoemake and his wife Dana, who live on the land nearby, have found what might be this cave entrance back in the woods.

"It's small," Shoemake said. "I've tried to see down in it. Somebody had taken some logs and criss-crossed them over it so nobody would fall in."

They have also found other evidence of previous human habitation in the area --

gravestones.

(Pictured: Standing at the new sign proclaiming the former location of Buck Mountain Hotel are, from left, Carol Bradford, assistant archivist; Gary Shoemake; Paige Shoemake; Betty Stark, volunteer; and Glenn Jones, Putnam County archivist).

"I knew there were graves somewhere on the property and I found some stones way back in the 80s when my parents bought the place, but I can't find those stones now," Shoemake said. "As far as there once being a cemetery and old hotel here, I had no idea."

One day while playing along the property, the couple's young daughter, Paige, stumbled across what looked like might be even more gravestones.

"(The graves) are all knocked down and twisted around and they've been moved around," Jones said. "You couldn't just pick up one (gravestone) and say it goes exactly here or there. Someone plowed it all up, destroyed it and took the (headstones) away."

Several headstones have gone missing from the property over the years. One for someone named Sydney Ward -- born Sept. 13, 1798, and died April 2, 1865 -- was featured in a photo with the 1974 Herald-Citizen article, latter disappeared, and was just this past week re-discovered in Buck Lake Cemetery, which will be open for public viewing.

The recovered tombstones are in the process of being moved to a site off of the Shoemake's property and into a new area near the recently erected Buck Mountain Hotel historical marker.

"There's all kind of these cool things around Putnam County," Jones said

The next featured community in the Forgotten Crossroads series will be the Brotherton community.



Current and former residents of the Brotherton community are invited to be in a group photo to be taken at 2 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 19, by meeting at Brotherton Baptist Church on Buck Mountain Road.

Anyone with historical information about Brotherton, further information about the Buck Mountain Hotel or any other "almost forgotten" community in Putnam County, can call the archives at 931-520-0042.

(Pictured: Eight-year-old Paige Shoemake holds up what she and her family believe

is one of the tombstones on their property near the former location of the old Buck Mountain Hotel).

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