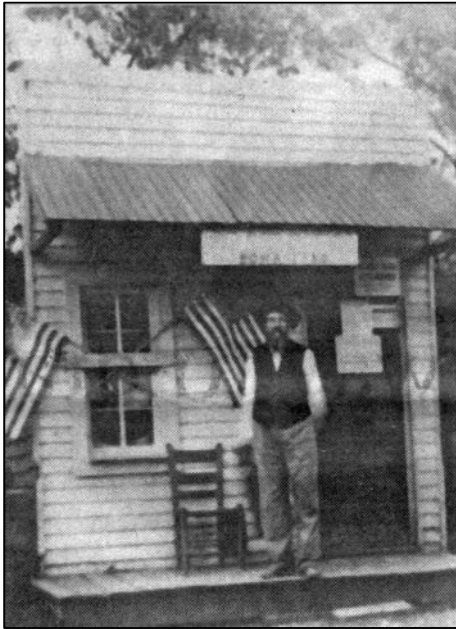


PHOSPHATE MINES BROUGHT PEOPLE TO BOMA

by Megan Trotter
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PUTNAM COUNTY - The Putnam County Archives, in its search for "almost forgotten communities" in Putnam County, is turning its sights on the Boma Community in the southwest, along Old Baxter Road.

Stories say that the town was named by Franklin Pierce Fisher, who submitted the names of his two daughters to the U.S. Postal Service. The name of his daughter, Bomar, was chosen and then the "r" was dropped, making the name "Boma." The post office there opened in Sept. 1888 with William T. Maxwell installed as the first postmaster.



(Pictured: Jacob M. Stewart stands in front of the old Boma Post Office).

"The reason that the trains stopped in Boma was because of the phosphate mines," said Eris Bryant, who grew up in the community and who is a history buff herself. "We had two phosphate mines there. That's the big reason why they organized the stop, and that's the reason (the U.S. Postal Service) asked Mr. Fisher to come up with a name."

The railroad ticket office was located in a store owned by L.M. Anderson, who was the first to sell ice cream cones in the Boma community. The train would also stop in Boma if there was mail waiting to be picked up, even though there was no depot in the community. According to Hilda Cooper Anderson, a long-time resident of Boma, as the train approached, an arm-like device would extend from the train and the mailbag would be placed on the arm and then pulled into the train.

The postal service was periodically moved to the community of Ai in July of 1895, but reopened in Boma in February of 1896 with John W. Whitehead as postmaster. Other postmasters over the years included William T. Anderson, Haskell Nabors, John D. Lowe, Robert S. Gentry, Alfred Taylor, Dealie Anderson, Ruth Barks, Franklin Pierce Fisher, Jacob Stewart and Lillian Barks. However, by Feb. 28, 1959, the post office closed and was moved to Baxter.

"In the late 50s and 60s, we had two stores in the community, and we had a beauty shop (owned by Malbert Brown), we had a restaurant and we had a school," Bryant said.

The stores included a feed store for the cattle, and the grocery store/dry goods store. Bryant remembers visiting each one over the years, especially the restaurant.

"It was unique to have a restaurant in a little town like that," she said. "We also had a source of water that not a lot of communities had, and that was an underground spring that to this day has never gone dry. That spring is called Finley Springs. It's still located in the Finley community, and back in the day before you had running water, people would come there to fill up all kinds of big containers. I'm talking just a little trickle of water out of the ground, and it's next to my parents' house is how I know all about it."

Over the years, the Boma community was also home to a blacksmith shop owned by Odell Maxwell in the late 40s and early 50s, that was later replaced by a grocery store owned by Lem Spears. Records list other store operators as John Barks, Ruth Barks, Earl Lowe, Wade Butler, Newt Taylor, Joe Sid Shanks, Dicy Hancock, Julius Jared, Lem Spears and Dow Maxwell. There were also two churches that survive to this day - New Hope Baptist Church and First Church of God - as well as a two-room schoolhouse for



grades 1-8. Classes held about five to eight students per class. Bryant remembers her teachers Artie Jarred and Mary Sue Saddler as well as the cook, Susie Lowe.

"From first grade through the eighth grade, I remember those, especially since I had them

the whole time I was there," she said.

The school burned down in 1989 under mysterious circumstances and the Boma Community Center was later built in its place, where it is now one of the most rented community centers in Putnam County.

(Pictured: Celebrating the new sign marking the location of the Boma community are, in front, from left, Faye Shanks, Joyce Fisher, Abigail Maynard, Isaac Maynard, Marley Kate Maynard, Leah Williams, Emma Maynard and Ella Allison. In back are Jeanie Lee, Carol Bradford, Eris Bryant, Yvonne Fisher Brunette, Peggy Fisher Williams, Gary Williams, Josh Maynard, Courtney Williams with Persephone Williams, Heather Lyons, Desiree Brunette and Connie Gentry. Photo by: Ty Kernea.

The Putnam County Archives thanks Bryant and Rebecca Whitefield Maynard for their contributions to purchasing the signs now marking the Boma community. Anyone with more information about Boma or any other "almost forgotten" community in Putnam

County, or those who are interested in contributing to the sign fund are invited to call the archives at (931) -520-0042.

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