

**OVERTON COUNTY, TN**  
**'Poor House' Folk To Get Grave Monument**  
By Amy Davis  
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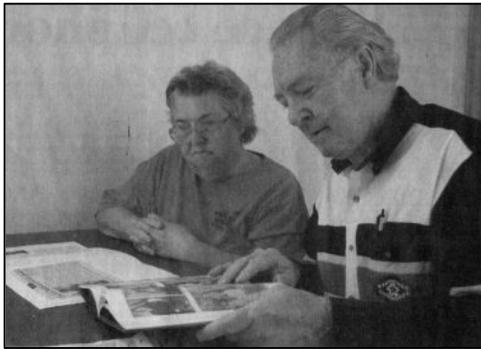
**LIVINGSTON** – They were the poor folks of Overton County.

No home.

No family.

And when they died, no stone to mark their final resting place.

Even today, the graves of the widows, orphans and others cared for at the old County House, also known as the "Poor House," remain unmarked.



But not for long.

Members of the Overton County Historical Society have stepped up to the challenge of not only erecting a monument at the Poor House Cemetery, which is located on County House Road in Livingston, but also adding the names of those buried there.

(Pictured: Overton County Historical Society members Shirley Key and Dennis Summers look through some historical books and information at their new office in the

VFW building at 208 N. Church St. in Livingston. The office is open on Saturdays from noon to 5 p.m.).

"The Poor house, which operated from 1902 to 1961, was for a lot of different people who, for whatever reason, couldn't take care of themselves," OCHS president Jim Loftis said. "Of course, since they didn't have the money to care for themselves, they sure couldn't afford a funeral service. So a lot of the graves are unmarked."



Funds for the monument are being raised through the sale of a Poor House history book OCHS members have compiled. The book, which is \$15, is one of several county history and pictorial books available at the historical society's new office in the VFW building at 208 N. Church St. in Livingston.

(Pictured: Books available at the OCHS office).

And since OCHS now has an office – its first office ever – members can further dedicate themselves to their mission of gathering, sharing and preserving Overton County history.

They can more easily pursue worthy historical projects too – projects like the Poor House Cemetery.

"We got a committee together for that, and I really think it's a good project," Loftis said. "It's the kind of thing we need to be doing – preserving the history we have before it's gone."

He said the historical society has so far learned of 45 graves in the cemetery, but they believe there are 75 total.

“The cemetery has only one stone that’s marked,” Loftis said. “With the proceeds from the book sales, our goal is to erect a monument with the names we know. As we continue to find more, we’ll add them.”

He said the historical hopes others will join in the effort as well. All they have to do is stop by the office, which is manned by two volunteers each Saturday from noon to 5 p.m., and share what they know. All information and photos are welcome.

“Maybe people in the community will know some of the names we haven’t found yet,” he said.

And perhaps they’ll know a lot more.

Historical society members Dennis Summers and Shirley Key sure hope so, anyway.

After all, discovering “new” historical information is what it’s all about for OCHS.

And while members eagerly await those new discoveries to come their way, Summers and Key stressed that the historical society also has much to offer in the way of sharing knowledge with others.

“If you have a question about something, we’ll try to answer it for you,” Summers said. And if we can’t, we’ll find someone who can.”

Those questions may concern one’s ancestry, historic buildings, grave sites...just anything having to do with local history.

“For example, I’m doing a study on Native Americans in the area,” Summers said. “So if someone wants to know if they have Native American ancestry, I generally will know because I’m chasing all that information down.”

A bulletin board is also going up at the OCHS office.

“If people are looking for information about a certain person, they can post it,” Summers said. “then if someone knows that person, they can give them a call. The older you get, the more you seem to want to chase down your roots.”

Another big project the historical society is gearing up for is a new county pictorial history book.

And they’re looking for contributors.

Key said, “If you have older family pictures that you want to go in the new pictorial book, bring them to the office, and we’ll make a copy. We’re looking for photos that have never been published before.”

Projects like the pictorial history book make OCHS members even more appreciative of their new office, which provides the space they need to organize photos and file information. They have computers and a scanner, as well as a work table, to make the process simpler.

Summers said, “I think having the new office will help us gather information and get information out because people now have a place to come to.. Hopefully, we’ll have enough visitors to keep us busy.”

He added that many people, particularly youths, know little about their family roots.

Key shared that sentiment.

“My mother always wanted me to research her family, and I didn’t have time when I worked,” she said. “In 1995, I lost my mother, and in late 1996, I lost my job.”

The she decided to do some research.

“I joined the historical society first, and I also worked with the Overton County Heritage Museum,” She said. “I just enjoy history, and I enjoy meeting people. It’s fun.”

Summers added, “Chasing down history is addictive. All of the sudden you’ll run across something you didn’t expect, you’ll get excited, and the next thing you know it leads you to finding out something else.”

And as far as Overton County history is concerned, there’s plenty more to discover, Loftis said.

“Different families have different information, and I’m sure there are a lot of areas we haven’t even touched the surface of yet,” he said.

What’s the best part of being an OCHS member?

“Finding out information and meeting different people,” Loftis said. “You’d be surprised how many people at a meeting share the same roots as you. It’s a great place to get to know people, share information and find out new things.”

The Overton County Historical Society meets the first Tuesday of each month at 5:30 p.m. at the Millard Oakley Public Library. Visitors are welcome. For more information, call Loftis at (931) 403-1017.

### **‘TREASURE’ PILING UP AT WHITE COUNTY HERITAGE MUSEUM**

By Amy Davis

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**SPARTA** – For most folks, a rummage through a old closet can be a daunting task.

What to keep?



What to toss?

But for a museum curator, it’s a treasure hunt.

Especially when that closet happens to be in a school building, and long-forgotten, handwritten record books are found.

And that’s just what happened recently when White County Heritage Museum curator Peggie Hurteau got her hands on a rare find passed along by museum volunteer and White county High School librarian Gail Scoggins.

In a closet being cleaned out at the school, she had discovered what Hurteau called the “treasure of all treasures.”

(Pictured: Museum curator Peggie Hurteau looks over the large collection of Tennessee pottery).

Saved from the trash.

“It was an old ledger book for court cases,” Hurteau said. “And as I was flipping through the pages, ‘8<sup>th</sup> Tennessee Calvary’ jumped right out at me.”

As did the name ‘Gen. Dibrell’ – the same Dibrell who happened to be a Civil War hero in Sparta and whose 1851 model Colt revolver is prominently displayed at the museum.

Hurteau explained the significance of the ledger book, saying, “In 1882, Gen. Dibrell started a reunion of the Confederate soldiers called the Old Soldiers.... His actual hand-written minutes from 1882-1885 are in that book. It tells where they got together for their first meeting and how they met on horseback downtown.”

“You read the names of these men over and over again in Gen. Dibrell’s muster roll, and then it’s like, ‘They were here! They signed these papers!’ It’s so fascinating,” she said.

The discovery of Dibrell’s revolver back around 2009 had also been a big thrill, as the weapon came with a unique story.



The 1851 Colt model 36 percussion caliber revolver had been presented to Dibrell by “friends and citizens of Sparta: at the formation of the 8<sup>th</sup> Tennessee Cavalry on Sept. 4, 1862.

(Pictured: One of the museum’s most prized exhibits is Civil War hero Gen. Dibrell’s revolver. Photo by Amy Davis).

Sparta tourism and marketing director Jody Sliger said, “He used it during the Civil War. He was a general and a hero and wasn’t captured until the end of the war.”

At that point, Dibrell’s personal sidearm – which even had his name inscribed – was taken away, having been kept as a war souvenir by the provost marshal of the 44<sup>th</sup> Indiana Infantry, never to be returned.

Until three years ago.

That’s when Hurteau’s husband, William, director of the museum, got a phone call from Dr. Sam Barnes of Cookeville, who discovered the revolver for sale on the Rock Island Arms website. The price tag: \$22,500.

“He told my husband, ‘You need to buy this back for White County,’ and we did!” Hurteau said. “We got with donations from the people – no city or county money.”

The revolver had been through the hands of Indiana insurance salesman Virgil Mylin, who bought it at a family auction in the 1950s, and then to Tom Lopiano of Southport, CT, who obtained it for his collection in 1997.

Now Dibrell’s revolver is back home in Sparta, on display in the museum for good.

Sliger said, “It doesn’t get loaned, so people have to come here to see it.”

Visitors will see plenty more as well, as each exhibit showcases a multitude of artifacts that continue to trickle in from the community – all of it thrilling for Hurteau, who just never knows what treasures will pop up next.

And that’s not a stretch, considering the fact that White County abounds in rich history.

“Our biggest problem at the museum is we’re running out of room,” she said. “We have so much stuff that’s been donated that is not on display.”

But the Hurteaus are working on that problem.

“We’re trying to get a grant to build a two-story addition,” she said. “We already have the architect’s drawing.”

As for what is on display, the museum has sections dedicated to White County's music traditions, military, education, industry, agriculture, law enforcement, pottery, Indian artifacts and the railroad.

"We have just about anything you can think of from White County that people are interested in," Hurteau said. "When people come here they stay for hours."

Sliger added, "And then they have to come back!"

Hurteau continued, "For everything we put on display, we try to have the history with it – information about who used it and what did they do with it."

Things like Gen. Dibrell's chamber pot. (Yes, the museum has that, too.)

In trying to decide on a favorite area of the museum, Hurteau, being a big bluegrass fan, said she'd have to choose the music section.

And with Sparta being home to world-renowned bluegrass legends Lester Flatt and Benny Martin, the museum just wouldn't be complete without such a display.

But big-name musicians aren't the only ones spotlighted there.

"I started finding all these local people who were musicians," Hurteau said. "This county is full of talent, so we started a little wall of fame here at the museum."

She pointed out one in particular – a woman, Gladys Flatt, who is now in her 90s and still living in Sparta.

"This lady in the glasses was a square dancer at the Grand Ole' Opry," Hurteau said. "She was Lester Flatt's wife."

A favorite destination for children is the railroad history section. They're lured there by the "chugga-chugga" sound of a tiny model train as it winds its way through a miniature version of Sparta.

Another interesting area – one of so many – is the one-room school house.

Hurteau pointed out the desks, explaining that they came from the Wallace Smith School, which was "the black school" in White County.

"We had a gentlemen, Mr. Henderson, who came into the museum and actually sat down at this desk, and I heard him say, 'Oh my! Those are my initials!' He had carved them into that desk when he was a little boy," Hurteau said.

"People do find themselves in this museum – either themselves or their ancestors."

She invites the rest of the community to come by and do the same.

The museum, located one block south of the White County Courthouse at 144 S. Main St., is open Thursday form 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and Friday and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is free. For more information call (931) 837-3900.

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