

Grundy County Historical Society

“Not a Fly-By-Night Outfit”

Written by Jackie Layne Partin

On February 22, 1988, seven interested citizens of Grundy County “**had a dream**” and saw a great need for the preservation of our county’s history. They organized themselves into a Historical Society. Those charter members were Amedia Conry, Inez Winton, Clydene Douglas, Anna Goforth, Renice Curtis, Boots Hunziker and Madge Baggenstoss. After having a bake sale and a book sale that netted the group \$195.70, they were off and running with their searches for Grundy County’s past and the preservation of all those exciting documents, photos, books, newspapers, etc. that were discovered. Others followed with the same passion and fervor as those original seven. When a small room in the Tracy City Public Library came available, then “*The Root Cellar*” was founded and became the home of the historical data that was collected by the Society.

In addition to the Society’s work, Grundy County owes a tremendous thanks to one of its historians, Mr. William Ray Turner, who has spent his entire life, collecting and sharing the past with its citizens and with folks from all over the country. His enthusiasm is manifested by the amount of tangible historical data in his shop and the extensive knowledge he is able and willing to verbally extend to any listener. He is to be commended and supported by all citizens of this county. Often he helps the Historical Society with facts and photos when they come up against a brick wall in their searches. Mr. Turner, “Thank you for being there for all those folks who are searching for their past.”

Many others added their expertise and “**had a need**” to work hard down through the years. They wrote about their findings. Families compiled notebooks on their heritages and sent them to the Society for all to see. Books were donated. “*The Pathfinder*” became a quarterly newsletter produced and mailed out to Society members and sold to non-members. Newspaper articles were being published. Cemeteries were being indexed, and individual metal signs were placed at each for future generations. Old maps and land deeds were resurrected and made available for all to see. The Society compiled and published their own books that became hits with researchers. Websites were set up and maintained.

Go to <http://gchs.homestead.com/> and <http://www.grundycountyhistory.org/> . One can also find the Society represented on **Facebook**.

All people have some love of ancestry in their blood – granted, some more than others, but we all have that need to know from whence we came. All of this adds up to the fact that our county needs and deserves a center for historical information. For too long the Grundy County Historical Society has operated out of a crowded little room at the back of the library and was thankful to have that, but it has outgrown the “*closet*.” Now we are on the verge of a new horizon, the Grundy County Historical Society Heritage Center.

Hopefully by the end of February, phase one of a three-phase construction project will be operational. The Research Library section of our new Heritage Center will open its doors to anyone who wants to use the data that has been collected by the Historical Society. Fittingly, the Library will be in a historic building formerly known as the Dorris/Cheek Drugstore. Many can still remember the courtesy shown by the Cheeks in the pharmacy. They remember the “comic book rack” – complete with Jimmy Cheek, a Dorris/Cheek descendant, sitting near, reading one comic after another. Jimmy’s favorite comic books were the “Fantastic 4–Super Heroes” and “The Green Lantern.” Subsequent to his reading, he declares that he also did some work. Without doubt, patrons also remember the soda fountain with its black-rimmed, glass top tables, surrounded by metal, wire-like chairs. A young Caldwell couple came every Sunday afternoon for one of the delectable, cherry-topped sundaes that every less-fortunate soul wished he had had the money to buy; instead, a nickel scoop of ice cream on a single cup cone was bought on the way across Laurel Street to the Dixie Theater to see the Sunday matinee. On Saturday evenings, Big John Harris lined up neighborhood children on their way to the theater and took them into Cheek’s Drugstore for an ice cream cone. He then walked them over to the Dixie Theater and bought them a ticket to see the Saturday night western. How much more excitement could there be than sitting inside the original Cheek’s Drugstore building, and reminiscing about the sodas shared with friends many years ago, while searching with anticipation for that long lost ancestor?

The Research Library will be furnished with computers, microfilms and machine, shelves lined with books pertaining to our county and adjacent counties’ histories, books composed of different families’ records, copiers, tables and chairs for comfort while taking notes, and an assistant. In the beginning, it will be entered from Depot Street and parking will be available in the rear or in front of the old bank building. Once up and running, archival contributions of historic significance will be accepted by the Society.

Israel of old in returning to their beloved city of Jerusalem, which lay in ruins, determined to rebuilt the temple and walls of their city. They were small in number with limited resources. They faced discouragement and their work was ridiculed, but they succeeded and overcame every obstacle because “...**the people had a mind to work.**” The Grundy County Historical Society, over one hundred members strong, has faced down obstacles with success. We have a “**mind to work**” and are determined to remain successful. Recently, Charles Sherrill, the newly appointed Tennessee State Librarian and Archivist wrote, “Historic preservation in Grundy County has come a long way in the past 30 years. Imagine what it may be like in thirty more!”

We welcome and encourage you to visit our Research Library Monday through Friday, 10:00 A.M. to 4:00 P. M. and on Saturday by appointment. We solicit your encouragement, patronage/membership, and financial support for phase two and three of our Center. Each phase will only bring more excitement. We promise that once the Heritage Center is full-grown, you will

not be disappointed. They, the charter members, “had a dream.” The least, those of us who are younger can do, is help them fulfill that dream.



Mrs. Anna Goforth – Charter Member



Packing to move from “The Root Cellar” to the new “Research Library”



Work going on in the old Dorris/Cheek Drugstore, which will become the new “Research Library”



Rear: Research Library
Corner: Restoration of 1904 First National Bank Building to be used as Assembly Room and Museum;
Right: More Museum display area