

# COFFEE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



September 2024

## CONTACT INFORMATION:

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### Officers and Directors:

President Larry McIntosh  
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Museum Curator Bonnie Gamble  
Directors Jeff Haley and Brent

## Society News

The Coffee County Historical Society will hold the membership meeting on Saturday, September 14 at 1:00pm. **Our speaker will be Ms. Judy Phillips, Archivist for Coffee County.** The meeting will take place at the Coffee County Courthouse on the square in Manchester, 101 Fort Street.

Ms. Phillips will make a presentation on the formative years of Coffee County. Coffee County was formed in January 1836 and much of today's county still was under the jurisdiction of Franklin County. Men in Nashville and places far away came and took land that had been in settlers' possession for some 30-50 years. Judy Phillips will present a look into the past and the lives of those formative years of the county.

**Nominations are now open for the Coffee County Historical Society. If you would like to nominate someone, please contact Bonnie Gamble.**

**Website Upgrade:** Our upgrade proceeds and we have posted an index of scanned African American citizens from 1940s and 1950s and information about the Confederate Cemetery in Beechgrove. Please take time to look at the site at [cctnhs.org](http://cctnhs.org). Our newsletters are posted on the website. If you do not see on the website what you need, please email us at [cchs1969@att.net](mailto:cchs1969@att.net) and we will help you.



*Its Fair Time! Coffee County Fair 1941*

## Volunteers Needed

The work of the Coffee County Historical Society is only possible through the efforts of our volunteers. These volunteers keep the office and museum open, conduct research, scan photographic negatives, index resources, and give assistance in family research. We can always use additional help. Please contact us if you are interested. **Thank you to our newest volunteers Jake Sherrill and Connie Hunt!**

# Joanna Lewis Museum of Coffee County History

Come See Our Special Exhibit “Celebrations”

Our museum has a new exhibit to run from September 4- October 23, 2024, entitled “Celebrations”. We are documenting how citizens in Coffee County came together to celebrate through the 4<sup>th</sup> of August African American reunion that started in 1876, the Coffee County Fair which originated in 1895, Old Timers Day and the infamous Guinness Book of Records Pajama Party. Come enjoy the exhibit and view our unique photographs and stories of these celebrations. The exhibit will be open until October 23, 2024. Our museum is free no admission fee.

The Joanna Lewis Museum of Coffee County History has permanent displays and exhibits about the history of Coffee County. We are always seeking artifacts and objects that we can use in our exhibits. If you would like to donate items to the museum or are interested in developing a temporary exhibit, please contact Bonnie Gamble at [blgamble@charter.net](mailto:blgamble@charter.net) or Sandra McMullin Bennett at 615-415-6444.

## News from the CCHS Library

The library was recently gifted a copy of Fawn Weaver’s **Love & Whiskey, the Remarkable True Story of Jack Daniel and His Master Distiller , Nearest Green.** It is the story of the Nearest Green, an enslaved man who taught young Jack Daniel how to make whiskey and who, after emancipation became the first Master Distiller at the now world-famous Jack Daniel’s Distillery. Ms. Weaver is CEO of Uncle Nearest Distillery in Shelbyville, founded in 2017. Society members may check this book out of our Library.

## Facebook Photo Identification

The Coffee County Historical Society has many historic but unidentified historic photographs. At least weekly we are posting a photo that has been donated to the Society without any labels or identification. With you help, we have been able to identify and catalog several of these. We want to keep the momentum going, so check us out on Facebook. For the sake of your great-grandchildren’s great-grandchildren, please ID your photos using a pencil or archival pen or tag them if digital. Too much history is lost because we forget to label photos.



Topsy Layne and Mr. Grosch at the Post Office on the Square

## The Historic Coffee County Courthouse

Coffee County Government and the Coffee County Historical Society are partnering in two grant applications to improve the downstairs of the courthouse. The first grant is from the Tennessee Historical Commission Historic Property/Land Acquisition Fund that requires a 10% match for properties on the National Register of Historic Places. The Coffee County Courthouse is on the National Register and the requirement of the grant is renovation must be according to the historic conditions of the courthouse. Our proposed project would return the main hallway to the 1871 appearance when the courthouse was rebuilt. This would entail removing old paneling on the wall and returning to plaster walls while removing the old vinyl tiles and bringing the floor back to the original wood floor.

The Historic Society is applying for a Tennessee State Museum Capital and Maintenance Grant. This proposed grant project would replace the existing ceiling tile and lights in the main hallway of the courthouse and museum rooms with decorative tin and museum quality LED lights.

These grants led to researching again the old records of the rebuilding of the courthouse which burned on Monday morning December 28, 1870. An investigation by a committee of commissioners from the county reported that “All of the Circuit Court Clerk’s record books were saved with the exception of the State Docket.” “ Nearly all the files and loose papers of the latter office were destroyed, including state and civil papers.” Almost all of the Clerk and Master (Chancery Court) books and records were destroyed.

The committee examined witnesses and took testimony but could not “arrive at a definite conclusion except it was the work of an incendiary” They also indicated that while they did not think anyone purposely did not act to save records but that clerks spent too much “seemingly strange amount of deliberation and judgement in an effort to save the records. We are satisfied in ordinary deliberation and judgement had been exercised when the courthouse was observed to be on fire, every paper in the courthouse could have been saved.

What do we know from papers filed in the County Court about what materials went into the rebuilding of the courthouse. It was a basic Italianate design with four entry ways. A north-south hallway and doors and an east-west hallway.

At the April Term of the County Court in 1871, the commissioners tasked with the courthouse rebuild reported the following.

1. All the brick work let to Henry Geiy? For \$2,200. All exterior brick was to be hard purposed brick and to be laid in good lime and sand mortar in a good workman like manner.

2. Contracted all the woodwork, iron, and tin work, plastering and stonework to I.C. and D.S. Wright of Nashville for the sum of \$8500.
3. Important that all brick and plastering get done in summer months and need an appropriation for \$12,000 to get the work going.
4. Paint Oils and burnt umbre and linseed oil purchased from E.S. Hough in Manchester.
5. June 1876 report recommended replacing ““The necessity of replacing the stain carpet was apparent to all . We saw the old, ragged carpet nearly throw an aged citizen down the steps and we decided to put down a new one..” It seems probable that carpet runner was present in the main hallway also at that time.”
6. “Motion of James Price ordered that the building committee are instructed to have made and put up in EACH room of the courthouse around the inside walls of said rooms chair boards and give the Janitor a load of saw dust and spittoon.
7. 1882 ordered H.W. Carrol to contract to have roof and cupalo to “ be painted in three colors. Painting includes roof, cupola, window frames, sash cornice, chimney tops, doors, gutters.
8. 1882 Sherriff Carrol bought 14 gallons of prepared paints, 25lbs White lead, 6  $\frac{3}{4}$  gallon of linseed oil, 1 can of green paint,  $\frac{1}{2}$  gallon Japan varnish, 1 box French Ochre, 2 boxes Prussian Blue, 1 Box black 2lbs putty .

