

# COFFEE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



March 2025

## Society News

The Coffee County Historical Society will hold our March membership meeting on **Saturday, March 8th at 1:00pm. The location is at the Coffee County Courthouse on the Square in Manchester. The address is 101 West Fort Street, Manchester TN.** The presentation will come from you the members and visitors! It is time to share stories of meeting famous people, taking part in historic events or bring an interesting historic object or photo.

Update on Grant projects: The Coffee County Historical society received a \$30,000 grant from the Tennessee State Museum for Capital Improvements. We will be replacing the ceiling tiles in the museum and main hallway and install new lighting. This work is tentatively scheduled for February-April 2025. We will post more accurate times on our Facebook page when the museum will be closed for this renovation.

The Historical Society received a Bonnaroo Works Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee for \$5,000 to purchase a multimedia museum display.

**Welcome new members Judy Skelton and Cheryl Horton!**

## CONTACT INFORMATION:

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Officers and Directors:

President Larry McIntosh

Vice President Jeff Haley

Treasurer Frances Simmons

Assistant Treasurer Butch Niederhauser

Officer Manager Connie Hunt

Recording Secretary Lori Amos

Publications Editor Nathan Havenner

Museum Curator Bonnie Gamble

Directors Sandra McMullin Bennett and Brent Parsley



1947-1948 Band Majorettes for Coffee County High School. Can you name any of these people?

The Coffee County Historical Society is a partner with the Coffee County Government in a grant from the Tennessee Historic Commission to renovate the main hallway at the Coffee County Court House. This will fund the removal of the old wall paneling and restoring to a circa 1870s plaster wall. The current flooring will get removed and a wood floor install in keeping with a 1870s appearance. The installation of new tin ceiling tiles and lighting is also part of this renovation. A time line for this work is still in development

## **Joanna Lewis Museum of Coffee County History News**

Come See Our Special Exhibit “World War II and the Home Front.”

Due to our impending renovations to the museum rooms, the museum will not create any new exhibits until the renovations are complete. We will keep up our exhibit entitled “World War II and the Home Front.” We are documenting how citizens in Coffee County experienced the influx of 70,000 service personnel during the Middle Tennessee Maneuvers and the domestic challenges of the war. The exhibit features items from World War II and the 1940s. Learn about rationing, polio outbreaks, military use of buildings and farms, and the men who made Coffee County their home before shipping out to Europe and the Pacific. Our museum is free and open Tuesday-Saturdays 9:00am-1:00pm.

The volunteer staff of the museum though is busy conducting research during the renovation for future exhibits and programs. We are currently undertaking the identification of the first African American families in Coffee County. This is a challenge due to the enslavement of the majority of African Americans in Coffee County prior to emancipation and records do not document these early men and women. We are utilizing the marriage records of 1865-1870 and the 1870 census to compile a list. This research will form the basis for an exhibit and also a Coffee County Historical Society publication. We are also researching new information for a Beech grove/Noah publication.

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.

### **Our Media Collection**

The Coffee County Historical Society has put to good use an additional photo negative scanner and computer to speed up our process of scanning historic negatives of the Hugh Doak collection. We do need volunteers willing to scan and index these photos. If you are interested, please email or call us!

### **Publications Update**

We are very fortunate to have Nathan Havenner as our volunteer Publications Editor. He worked for several local newspapers, including the Manchester Times, writes freelance articles, and currently works at the Coffee County Library. The publications committee decided that a two pronged approach was needed for the society. One was the need to digitize the wonderful research and articles of past Coffee County Historical Quarterlies and make them available on our website. The other is to produce new publications that can take advantage of the Hugh Doak Collection of photographs, local archival records and the digitized newspapers.

The first publication we will digitize the Coffee County Historical Quarterly “Leaves from the Beech grove” compiled by David Jacobs and edited by Betty Anderson Bridgewater from 1978. Our new publication will build on this work and expand the knowledge of the Beech grove/Noah area of Coffee County and will come out in the Spring of 2025.

### **Volunteers Needed!**

We are in great need of volunteers to help us continue with our work. If you enjoy history and have a curiosity of the past, then we have plenty of tasks to satisfy you. We can do some easy training and get you started and we will welcome whatever time you have available. Email us at [cchs1969@att.net](mailto:cchs1969@att.net) if

## WHAT IS IN A NAME?

What is it like to not have a last name? How do we identify with our family and ancestors without a last name? This is the dilemma that faced all emancipated enslaved people after the Civil War. During their enslaved period, they were referred to only by a first name or worse yet as someone's negro. The legal records prior to emancipation document them often as nameless property for sale, leasing, or inheriting. Sometimes a first name was given in records but not often.

When I first began to examine the marriage records and legal records of African American citizens in Coffee County, I found so many with the same surname. Naively I thought were there many people marrying cousins and did this many people come from the same blood families? Then the light bulb finally came on in my head and I realized they shared a common last name as signs of ownership by the same families. Some examples are of Henry Hickerson marrying Eliza Jane Hickerson in 1866 and Moses Powers to Harriett Powers August 28, 1865. There are many more examples in these early African American records where approximately 148 marriages were recorded in Coffee County 1865-1866. The freed men and women of Coffee County took advantage of the ability to legalize unions and establish families for the first time.

The legal records of this early time period also reflect this adoption of a surname often linked with their enslaver. We have records of witnesses and depositions where a number of African Americans have the same last name but are not biologically linked together. We can still observe the effect today with many African American's having the same last name but do not come from a common ancestor but instead a common owner. It is a very interesting and sometime frustrating exercise to utilize the surname to determine who the owner was of the individuals. The 1860 census gives numbers and ages of slaves but not any names or other identifying information.

Our hope with the First Families of African Americans in Coffee County is to provide people a link to their heritage and to trace their connections to the history of Coffee County.

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