



A Walk In Time...

Past, Present & Future

Chartered on July 4, 1983

OFFICERS

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"A Walk in Time" is published by and for the Oliver Springs Historical Society. Anyone may submit material for the newsletter. The editor reserves the right to edit submissions. For questions or to submit material, email suezzee@aol.com.

MUSEUM INFORMATION

HOURS OF OPERATION:

Tuesday 10:00 am - 2:00 pm

Friday 10:00 am - 2:00 pm

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Oliver Springs Historical Society Quarterly Newsletter

Volume 1, Issue 2 April 2025

The Quarterly Forum - Woody Duncan

As we set our sights on the future of the museum, we must take great care to protect and preserve our building for sharing the history of Oliver Springs. You may have noticed some construction activity taking place outside the museum. The museum was built in 1922 by Thomas Abston and his business partner Johnny Cox. After 103 years, the structure was in dire need of some maintenance work performed to help preserve the historic building, which is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Measures are currently underway to maintain the building's historic character, authenticity, and integrity while ensuring its continued use and enjoyment. A process called "pointing bricks" is taking place which involves replacing old, deteriorated mortar between bricks with new mortar to maintain the structural integrity and appearance of the brick. Deteriorated mortar weakens brickwork, potentially leading to loosening bricks, cracks, or even structural collapse. This process helps protect against damage from the weather and prevents bricks from becoming loose or collapsing. The repointing will also improve the aesthetic appeal of a brick building by restoring it to its original condition.

As you can see from the pictures, the process is bringing back the building to a specific period of its history and hopefully fosters a sense of ownership and pride in the building's history. *(continued on next page)*

BEFORE



AFTER





THE QUARTERLY FORUM *continued from page 1*

Another project underway is to add an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant bathroom next to the other bathrooms. This is being accomplished by modifying the existing bathrooms and creating another bathroom between the men's and women's bathrooms to meet accessibility standards for individuals with disabilities. The current ADA bathroom was in the theatre area and was not a convenient location for a bathroom and the new location will provide better accessibility for people with disabilities.

As we have limited storage, one half of the existing ADA bathroom will now become storage and the other side of the wall in the streetscape area will be used to place the original bus ticket booth in the area designated as Reaves Café.

These projects were made possible by a Maintenance and Improvement Grant through the State of Tennessee. The grant will not cover the full cost of these projects and we are incredibly grateful for your continued support to allow us to continue to provide a tangible link to the stories, events, and people who shaped our community. These changes can only be realized through the generosity of our supporters.



TRIVIA BOX ... by Wes Lee

At one time the Wind Rock mine had over 1200 miles of entries and airways. That is more than the distance from Chicago, IL to Orlando, FL.



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Ms. Carolyn Kelly

RESTORED STONECIPHER-KELLY HOME REVISITED

by Pat Crowe

I've often listened to and remembered the stories of the Stonecipher-Kelly home, located in Morgan County, as remembered and told by Ms. Carolyn Kelly. We would occasionally pass by the home on our way to Wartburg and sometimes she would make the statement, "Oh, I hope I can go inside that house again." She would then begin reminiscing about the hidden rooms she saw when visiting with her late husband James Kelly, a grandson of the Kelly family.

On Saturday, May 3rd, the Frozen Head State Park Rangers held a pre-opening of the restored Stonecipher-Kelly home Ms. Carolyn had reminisced about. So, we picked her up from her home in Oliver Springs and made the trip to the place she always wanted to return. Sure enough, the home was amazing. Ms. Carolyn was correct in her vivid description of the home and its secret rooms. It was just as she remembered. Upon entering the front doorway, the massive stone fireplace immediately demanded attention. It seemed to take you back into a time zone that told the story of the home and its family, their struggles and their way of life.

To the left of the fireplace was a dark corner revealing an almost hidden and winding staircase with a narrow and steep upward turn leading to the bedrooms upstairs. The bedrooms displayed the almost lost beauty of craftsmanship, with the half dovetail notched logs and wide floor planks. A showcase of old newspapers was still plastered on the walls while an old cord bed was displayed in the middle of the room. Ms. Carolyn began describing an original handmade cord bed that was in her home, made by Grandpa Kelly when he was living there.

The Park Rangers were so impressed with Ms. Carolyn's storytelling of the old homeplace, they scheduled a session to video the history she remembered of the family home when the Kelly's lived there. The homestead has been wonderfully restored and is a treasured showplace for the citizens of Morgan County. As for the hidden rooms you will just have to visit and see for yourself. The Park Rangers have scheduled an open house on June 7th. More information on the Open House can be found on the next page (page 4). What an adventure it will be to tour the beautiful restored Stonecipher-Kelly home and its grounds. If walls could talk what stories they could tell.

Stop and listen, you might hear one...





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Stonecypther - Kelly Open House

Frozen Head State Park June 7 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Built in 1814, the Stonecypther Kelly house is an important historic landmark in Morgan County. The house was one of the very first European homesteads in the area, and today it is the oldest standing homes in the county.

Join us for this Grand Opening event to celebrate the rich history of this beloved site. Event activities include: House & Grounds Tours, Smoky Mountain Model A Club, Traditional Weaving Demonstration, Antique Tractors, Cast Iron Cooking Demonstration, Old-Time Music and much more.

Event grounds open at 10am on the 7th and activities conclude at 4pm.

Roane County Youth Leadership Visits Museum

Roane County Youth Leadership is a six-month program that invites students from all schools in the county to apply. The goal of the program is to improve students' leadership skills through class study, interactions with community leaders and exercising the skills they learn through a community service project.

Each year's program starts the first full week after school is over, with a camp week and ends with a graduation in the fall. This program is thrilled to annually visit the **Oliver Springs Historical Museum**. Students that successfully completed the program are eligible to apply for one of the scholarships awarded during their senior year

This year, Museum Board Members, Jerry White and Cecil Crowe were happy to be the tour guides through the Museum. Jerry and Cecil told stories about Oliver Springs in the early days. The students walked through the Streetscape and the interactive displays that offered a look of OS High school sports locker room, a doctor's office (with a patient), a Barbershop, a kitchen of the time and more examples of how residents of Oliver Springs lived in the past.





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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Stanley Vann



Stanley Vann is our member in the Spotlight this quarter. Stan is a lifelong resident of Oliver Springs except for one year when he lived in Knoxville after graduation. Stan graduated from Oliver Springs High School in 1969.

Stan and Sandy Gilmore were married in 1972 until her passing in 2010. They have two children, Brent and Michael, and three grandkids. Through the years, Stan has enjoyed playing in softball and basketball leagues. He also enjoys playing golf and was a go-kart racer for five years. Stan married Brenda Goodson in 2013. Stan and Brenda attend Pine Ridge Baptist Church.

Stan has been a member of the Oliver Springs Historical Society since 2013 and has also served on the Board of Directors. Stan has been a driving force for the success of the October Sky Festival for the past seven years. The festival has grown each year and last year was the largest number of vendors we have had with 140 vendors.

As the coordinator for the October Sky Festival, Stan actually begins preparations for the upcoming festival in February by updating vendor documents from the previous festival, sends out applications to vendors for the upcoming festival and establishes vendor list for festival as vendors start submitting their applications. Once applications are received, vendors are assigned designated spaces and each vendor is notified by email. The day before the festival, Stan can be seen at Arrowhead Park prepping the area and ensuring the vendor spaces are marked off and each vendor has an assigned space. On the day of the festival, Stan is busy hours before the festival begins helping direct the vendors to their assigned spots.

With the promise of the Festival being bigger and better each year, Stan is a valuable asset in the success of the October Sky Festival

In addition to October Sky, Stan is also responsible for movie night. Stan selects and shows a movie every second Saturday at the museum. The movie is free but donations are greatly appreciated. Prior to starting the movie, you will find Stan and his wife Brenda selling concessions. Stan makes some of the best popcorn around. Come say HI to Stan and Brenda!



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by Wes Lee

In the Past...a PRISON?

At the head of the valley was the Cumberland Mine, owned by the Cumberland Coal Mining Company. Col. J.W. Renfro, of Atlanta, Georgia, was the President of the company and Capt. T.R. Evans was the superintendent in June of 1890. The company at that time was working about 95 convicts, mostly black. The mine entered the hillside as the other mines passed along the way up the valley. **Except** this mine had only one entrance shaft, as opposed to the free labor mines, usually with more than one entrance. Around this entrance shaft was a strong high fence, or stockade, about 16 feet high. The area enclosed by the stockade was nearly two acres. To put that in perspective, if the stockade was a square it would be around 295 feet on each side or almost a quarter of a mile around.

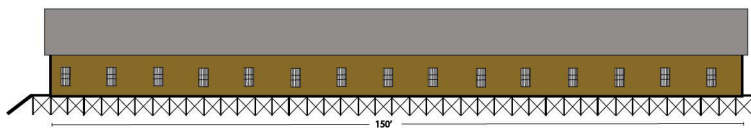
In the middle of this stockade was the **Big Mountain prison**. The prison was built of heavy timber and boards, and was 150 feet long and 28 feet wide, with a roof pitch of 14 feet. The interior was sealed up to the rafters to give it an open feel and had an air hole in each room protected from the rain and finished with iron bars. The windows along the side of the prison were plentiful and strongly protected with iron bars and afforded the inmates ample fresh air and sunshine. To keep the sanitary conditions the best, the building was set five feet off the ground and leveled under the entire building and kept as clean as a sanded floor.

The prison was divided into four rooms, the first and largest was the dining room and hall. At the end of the dining room was a guard closet, where a guard would sit with gun in hand and see every movement from his perch. The next room was a small one for the guard sleeping quarters and where they ate. Then another small room for the sleeping quarters of the white convicts. This was unusual for the time as most prisons kept blacks and whites sleeping in the same quarters.

The last room was a large room where the black convicts slept. The aisle extended the whole length of the building and had mammoth stoves for use during the winter. Water was brought from up on the side of the mountain through pipes to porcelain-lined sinks. Sanitary conditions were considered good for the time.

The stockade had two gates, one on either side with an armed guard at each, then on two opposite corners were two small guard towers with each having a guard with eyes on the enclosure. There were six guards, for the day and two night guards, and the warden. In the back of the stockade was the mine shaft into the mountain. From this shaft were tunnels off into the mountain and through the coal banks. The food was considered good and prisoners were given all they could eat. Items like corn bread, boiled bacon, beans, coffee, sugar and seasonal vegetables. They had flour bread two or three times a week and occasionally deserts. Ample tobacco was also provided. They had a Dutch oven that could cook for 500 men, with immense cauldrons to boil meats, vegetables and coffee.

Dr. A.K. Shelton would come out every morning from Oliver Springs to check the convicts before work. If a convict worked well and mined four tons a day, he was allowed to twenty cents a ton over that amount. One example of a young convict in his teens mined 17,000 pounds, giving him 9,000 pounds extra for which he received ninety cents. The prisoners had church in the hall every Sunday and some even led the service.



Side view of Main Prison Building at Big Mountain c1890



Col. J.W. Renfro



“I Promise to Do”

The State of Tennessee “ Promise Scholarship” program is a last-dollar scholarship and mentorship program for high school students desiring to further their education after high school. To qualify for this scholarship students faithfully commit for volunteer work for a certain number required hours with a non-profit organization. The OS Historical Society has been privileged over the years to participate in this program by providing the students with projects to obtain these hours.

This year we were proud to sponsor two outstanding high school students for this scholarship program. They are:

Orion McKnight, graduating from Roane County High and also attending Roane State Community College has volunteered above and beyond any requirements for a high school student. Orion has volunteered for the last five years at our annual October Sky Festival. He has diligently worked preparing and setting up our vendor booth that sells the famous “Crystal Kreme” hot dogs and assisting with various tasks. We are very proud of Orion and wish him the best in his college ventures and goals.

Kaylee Crowe, graduating from Knoxville Central High, has completed her volunteer hours and has accepted a scholarship to the Univ. of Tenn this coming fall. Kayle worked efficiently in the archive department completing the tasks assigned to her by mentor Patsy Stansberry. Kayle also completed her promise hours by displaying her personal art work to amuse our visitors when entering a low clearance area in the upstairs section of the museum. Too often in low clearance areas its easy to forget to tell people to “**duck**”.

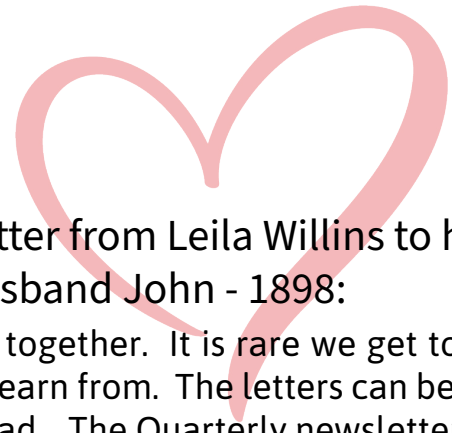
We have been very blessed to have these students participate in the “Tennessee Promise” scholarship program by working with our mentors at the historical museum. We look forward to assisting other high students in achieving their “I promise” goals.



Kaylee Crowe

Orion McKnight





Hotel Love Letters continued...

EDITORS NOTE:

These letters are placed on next page so they can be seen together. It is rare we get to "see" a vision of how the past lived, so it is a gift to us to enjoy and learn from. The letters can be seen at the Museum in various formats which are much easier to read. The Quarterly newsletter will be placing a letter in each edition to read for your enjoyment and to intrigue you to come in and explore further into every day life in 1898. The letters are now available for your enjoyment at the Museum.

Letter from Leila Willins to her husband John - 1898:

Oliver Springs
Aug 4/1898

My darling sweetheart,
You must have been getting over a spree when you wrote your last letter, for if it had not been for your name in your own writing I never in the world would have thought it was

thank Mr Jackson for the fruit I have not done it so. thought I would leave it to you, or suppose you telephone him and say I told you to thank him for me. The girls are getting up a man only for that girls to night and I have to take part of man. There is a man that came last night and he

written Aug 4/98.
But never the less I was glad to get it.
John Mr Rainey asks me to tell you to go to Byrds and see about his watch for him, that he wants them to send it right away.
Mrs Lucy Mrs Shelly and all the men since their love to you so be sure and send it back. They all say how much they miss you as you see you are missed by all.
I wish I could see you you don't know how much I miss you.
John would you if you were me. Well and

Dance very much like you only not quite as well.
What do you do with your doll sweet self every night - just play polka you have not said any more about it.
Mr J. C. lost \$10 yesterday. I wish there was something to do, but there is such a nothing, since Ed has gone no more will pay for the things we do so we have nothing to do now but sit around and talk. If I should



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Oliver Springs Academy Partnership

A task list for the Oliver Springs Academy Performance Based Learning program has been developed to identify project items and is used as a tool for students to learn about historical people, places, exhibit items and events relating to Oliver Springs. One of the tasks is to design a display of the Oliver Springs Hotel and mineral springs. Verbiage and pictures were provided and the students were also given a diagram of the display area with the dimensions for each frame to be displayed.

Students would need to design the display within the dimensions provided while ensuring the font size would be the same for all frames while allowing for the various pictures. They would also need to determine material to be used for the display and how to mount on wall.

The student Project Manager for this particular task, **Aubrey Loy**, is shown in the picture providing an update on the display progress. As part of their assignment, the students present a presentation and/or provide an example of their plans prior to delivery of final product. Aubrey not only provided a progress report but laid out the draft frames on the floor to provide a show & tell. She explained her path forward and also provided suggestions for improvement.

Note from Oliver Springs Historical Society Project Lead: Students are encouraged to provide their thoughts and suggestions on any of the tasks. Not only do they have good ideas but I believe it also helps them to take ownership in their project and hopefully encourages them to take an interest in the history of Oliver Springs.

**History can be a great teacher if
we save it, preserve it, make it accessible
and teach it.**

Become a Member.
go to www.oshistorical.com, click on
GET INVOLVED.





A Walk In Time...

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OLIVER SPRINGS CROSS ON THE RIDGE

A large white cross looms over the city of Oliver Springs. Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall, it stands steady night and day on the ridge and watches over the city, as a reminder every day and night what is important in life. It has become a beacon for the townspeople. Even at times, OS High School football players (and sometimes coaches) have been known to look up at the Cross for inspiration and hope.

Every Easter morning before sunrise, there is a sound of people slowly trudging up the steep mountain trail to the Cross. This tradition started over 60 years ago and goes on still today. Yes, 7 AM Sunrise service conducted by a local minister over 60 years. WOW!

How did this tradition begin? In the early 60's, the land owner, Mr. Mead (family still owns the land) allowed a cross to be set up on his property on Walden's Ridge. It is still unknown where the cross came from, but Boy Scout Troop 222 set up the cross. Then the troop, along with youth and families from Oliver Springs Methodist church, cleared the property and dug out steps on the trail up to the Cross.

Over 60 years later, Mayor Jason Stiltner while visiting the Cross, noticed the area had not been maintained in quite a while. At that time, it was NOT visible from anywhere in town. Not being able to find who maintained that special area, Jason made a decision to clear it himself. Now, every year, Jason and a crew work diligently to keep the area maintained. Others helping Jason were Stacy Cox, Jimmy Henley, and Kenny Evans. Also, thanks to an anonymous gift of a solar light system at the base of the Cross, it is now visible at night for all to see.

This is the story of our Cross on the Ridge. It is a tradition not held lightly by the citizens of Oliver Springs. The youngsters that made the cross visible by clearing the area, and made the trail accessible to most, are now at Easter bringing their grandchildren up to worship at the Cross. THAT my friends, is an original Oliver Springs tradition!



18th Annual

October Sky Festival

Oliver Springs, Tennessee

Saturday, OCTOBER 18, 2025
10AM-4PM

100+ VENDORS at Arrowhead Park
Come see "Heritage at the Depot"
Visit restored Oliver Springs Museum
Walk the Main Street Classic Car Show
with over 200 cars!

**Come have some fun --
be a Festival volunteer**

apply at Museum on Tuesday or Friday 10-2

For Vendor Information, go to the website,
octoberskyfestivaltn.org

The Oliver Springs Historical Society invites you to help preserve the history of our town by becoming a member. We meet at 6 PM, on the first Monday of every month at the Museum, 301 Kingston Avenue in Oliver Springs.

Whether you are joining for the first time or renewing your membership, you will be contributing to the restoration of our new museum and archives. Your support is vital to the Oliver Springs Historical Society, and we appreciate your generosity and confidence.

A Membership form can be found on our website, www.oshistorical.com, on the home page, click GET INVOLVED.

GET INVOLVED BE A MEMBER

Oliver Springs Historical Society
P.O. Box 409
Oliver Springs, TN 37840

PLACE
STAMP
HERE