



A Walk In Time...

Past, Present & Future

Chartered on July 4, 1983

OFFICERS

Chairman: Jerry White
Treasurer: Cecil Crowe
Secretary: Sara Brummett

MUSEUM DIRECTOR:

Woody Duncan

NEWSLETTER EDITOR: Sue Orick

"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 10-2 PM

Thursday 4-7 PM

By appointment contact:
865-617-0813

Oliver Springs Historical
Society: P.O. Box 409

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Oliver Springs Historical Society Quarterly Newsletter
Volume 2, Issue 1 March 2026

The Quarterly Forum - Woody Duncan

The Oliver Springs Historical Society was a recipient of a grant from the 2025-26 Capital Maintenance and Improvement Program from the State of Tennessee. The funding came from \$5 million the Tennessee General Assembly made available in the 2025-2026 Appropriations Act, "for the sole purpose of providing grants to museums with a 501c (3) nonprofit organization for capital maintenance and improvements. We were awarded the grant to upgrade and improve the heating and air-conditioning units as well as move and relocate some duct work. The project is to be completed by June 29,2026.

Thanks to Cecil Crowe for his time and effort in submitting the request for the grant. These funds will be vital in helping preserve our local history by providing improved energy efficiency by eliminating "hot and cold spots" by providing more consistent airflow and temperature regulation. We should also realize financial savings for maintenance and repair costs.

Shoutout to Terry Holland for his outstanding work coordinating with the contractors for this project. We appreciate his time and effort and we are blessed to have volunteers like this who are dedicated and knowledgeable.

Bids were submitted from three contractors and the Board approved the proposal from Adkins Heating and Air Conditioning. The museum has been closed to visitors for the months of January and February due to weather conditions and other maintenance activities. After completion of the upgrade to the heating and air-conditioning system, a through cleaning of the entire museum will be conducted prior to reopening the museum.





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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



ROGER MIDDLETON

Roger Middleton was born in London, England in 1946. At the age of 13, Roger joined the Air Cadets and earned his glider pilot's license while still at school. He left high school at the age of 16 to continue his education with British European Airways as an indentured apprentice. Electrical and Instrument technician, which provided on-the-job training with formal qualifications.

Roger moved to Canada in 1970 and joined the Canadian Armed Forces Reserve Cadet Instructors List, teaching leadership, management and aerospace to Canadian teens. In civilian employment, after a couple of years as a contract aircraft maintenance engineer, he switched to medical electronics, working initially as an instructor, training field service engineers on new x-ray products, and was later promoted to product specialist. **One of his business cards read "Introducing Roger Middleton, the S-O-B from the factory with all the answers."**

After seven years in Canada, Roger met Howard Mahoney, who invited him to join a new team that he was forming to cover product service in the Western United States. Roger arrived in Los Angeles in 1977. After two years in California, he went to Chicago as an Area Service Supervisor. Two years later, Roger was relocated to the company headquarters in Cleveland, Ohio, where he was manager of the parts and repair department. A short time later he moved to purchasing, where he was tasked with locating and buying obscure components for a new technology called whole body Nuclear Magnetic Resonance, which today is better known as Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI). Due to Roger's extensive knowledge and experience presenting classes to cadets, Roger was tasked with developing safety programs for employees. When MRI moved from research and development to full production, he became a full-time Safety Engineer, a role that he filled for the next ten years until his retirement.

Roger continues to work with cadets at local, state, region and national levels. He is currently developing a seven-day Introduction to Nuclear Science and Energy course to be held in Oak Ridge during the summer of 2026.

How did he end up in Oliver Springs? Roger stayed in touch with Howard Mahoney, who retired and moved to back to the homestead in Tennessee, where he was invited to visit in 2008. When two years later he retired, Roger moved to Oliver Springs. While driving around town exploring on his first day, he came across a dilapidated building bearing a banner "Future home of the Oliver Springs Historical Society". Since he had previously served on the board of a similar organization in Ohio, he became intrigued and after making a few enquiries, was directed to Harvey's Furniture Store. There he met Sonny Harvey and two hours later he was on his way home with an invitation to attend the next meeting of the Historical Society, where he has been a member ever since.

We are fortunate that Roger has an interest in Oliver Springs and preserving its rich history and are deeply grateful for his generous commitment of time and support and his willingness to assist in whatever way he can.

If you get a chance to talk to Roger, it is evident that he is not from East Tennessee in the way he speaks. He does not have that southern drawl like most of us but he argues that he does have a Southern accent ... its just "Southern English, y'all!"



Amidst the chaotic carnival of modern life, you occasionally find yourself reminiscing about the golden days of yore, when downtown strutted its stuff with proud buildings. Ah, back when transportation was a wild adventure—convenience? Ha! What a laugh!

Reflecting on our hometown evokes a deep sense of nostalgia, capturing the essence of a simpler, bygone era. The streets were lined with a variety of stores, each offering a glimpse into daily life and local commerce. Small family-owned shops, general stores, and markets were the heart of the community, where residents could purchase everything from fresh produce to household necessities. Prices during that time were modest; a loaf of bread might cost a few cents, and a gallon of milk was often just a few dimes, making everyday life accessible and affordable for most families.

Let this list below take you back to life in Oliver Springs in 1907...

OLIVER SPRINGS 1907

1907 Oliver Springs – Population – 1,500

Railroads

- Southern Railway
- Louisville & Nashville Railway

Utilities

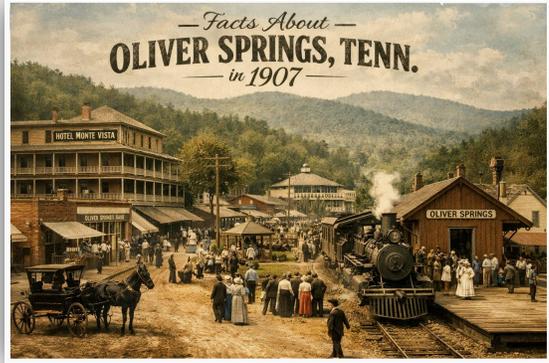
The streets are lighted with arc lights and all night services is had from the electric plant owned by F. C. and W. H. Sienknecht

Banks

A new bank building is going up. And the Oliver Springs Banking Company is doing fine business.



Oliver Springs 1907 (continued)



City Officials

- Mayor – Clem J. Jones
- Recorder – M. F. Cox
- Marshall – J. S. Kesterson
- Aldermen – John R. Richards, Alex Allen, J. H. McCart, A. J. Gardner, L. J. Jackson, C. J. Ladd

Physicians - Dr. J. A. Sienknecht, a young man is the city physician

Oliver Springs coal companies in operation in October 1907.

- | | |
|--|--|
| • Wind Rock Coal Company – 500 tons daily | • Eagle Coal Company – 75 tons daily |
| • Piedmont Coal Company – 200 tons daily | • Craig-Jackson Coal Company – 75 tons daily |
| • Butler Coal Company – 200 tons daily | • Oliver Coal Company – 50 tons daily |
| • Prudential Coal Company – 100 tons daily | • Winter's Gap Coal Company – 50 tons daily |
| • Poplar Creek Coal Company – 100 tons daily | • Tunnell Hill Coal Company – 25 tons daily |
| • Big Mountain Coal Company – 100 tons daily | • Mt. Carbon Coal Company – 25 tons daily |

Business News

The Oliver Springs Bottling Works recently moved into a new building.

Miss Edith Ross owns an up-to-date Millinery parlor.

General Merchandise Businesses:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| • J. S. Keebler General Store | • Cox & Company Commissary |
| • H. Sienknecht General Store | • John Mead General Store |
| • Richards Brothers Commissary | • B. Duggan General Store |
| • J. K. Butler Commissary | • J. J. Pickle General Store |
| • F. H. Hoskins General Store | • J. A. Brooks General Store |
| • Cross & Wright General Store | • J. H. Hackney General Store |

Factory News

The Oliver Springs Canning Company was doing exceedingly for their first season, canning tomatoes and beans. About seventy-five people were employed. The daily output was about 5,000 to 8,000 cans.

Church News

- The Baptist has just finished a new addition.
- A new Methodist Church recently was dedicated.
- The Presbyterian and Cumberland Presbyterian each had a large number of members.
- It was said a number of Catholics and Episcopalians also lived in town.



by Woody Duncan

Bringing History Home

History is not just found in books; it is preserved in the objects we hold dear. Most of our collections for exhibit consists of items donated by individuals. Each collection tells a story-not just of the past, but of the community that built it.

The story of Oliver Springs continues to grow richer, thanks to the incredible generosity of donors who have entrusted us with their cherished items. These in-kind donations of items are the lifeblood of our exhibits. Hopefully, seeing local history preserved encourages others to come forward, creating a “ripple effect” of preservation throughout the community. Every item donated is more than just “stuff”, they are tangible links to our collective past and ensures the long-term survival of our history.

We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to those who have contributed, as items donated – from family heirlooms to local business records – ensure that our unique history is documented and accessible to all.

We invite you to visit the museum and see how these generous contributions are being put to work.



Thanks to Ray French for donating the pictures and framed French’s Market newspaper advertisement sitting amongst the other items previously donated. In addition to the two pictures, there were a total of 14 more pictures to go along with this collection.



Pictured above is Malinda Yager with her donation, her 1971 Oliver Springs Sweatshirt.



Scales from Jake Ollice’s store, which was located across the street from Norwood Elementary. Donated by Cindy Kendall. To the right is original cash register and pictures from City Dry Cleaners, which was owned and operated by Sam and Bonnie Ruffner. Thanks Dianne (Ruffner)Slatton

Continued on next page...



COAL MINER'S STORY

Another addition to "Bringing History Home"

by Pat Crowe

Bob Brandenburg age 69 now living in Jacksboro, worked as a coal miner for 34 years. He is now an electrician and when I ask him about the coal mines, he began reminiscing about the days he worked in the mines.

"I loved coal mining. Didn't care much for the environment but I loved mining."

"The mornings seemed to come early as I gathered my gear and picking up my dust covered hard hat, my lunch box containing a sandwich or two, a thermos of hot coffee and if lucky a snack cake or left over muffin from the night before. I could see the heavy fog was still lying low on the dormant grass outside my window. Before putting on my work jacket that was hanging at the entrance of the door, I could see the coal dust still clinging to every fiber on the sleeves and when touched the particles of coal dust floated towards the floor. My dad worked in the coal mines too and that's just what people did in the Appalachian area."

The hours could be long, sometimes sixteen or more depending on the need. If one of the caves inside the mine exploded and workers were involved, you stayed until all was clear and safe. Before each shift the miners always double checked their equipment making sure there was enough kerosene in their lamps then step into the elevator that would lower us down into the dark shafts that were sometimes more than four hundred feet deep and for a zinc mine as much as 2200 ft. I have been in some mines that were nineteen miles long. Most were about 3 or 4 miles. Darkness was a part of our environment and bonding with your partner was our safety net watching each other's back. The depth of the dark tunnels with the drips of water running down the sides of the walls of black coal created a misty smell of dampness that would chill you to the bone. Catching pneumonia was a common illness and no one knew of the greater dangers of coal dust that would later plague our life as "Black Lung". I was one that helped keep those fans and lights working every day, all day. It wasn't unusual to see a small stream of gas with its blue flame dancing in the distance of one of the tunnels. On the extended long tunnels there would be a flat car ready to carry us deep into an area. Mining was done on your knees or bending over all day. There were no days or nights inside the mines, just darkness lite by the headlights of miners and a few dim lights down the pathways."



Continued on next page...

Other miners have spoken often about the Company owned stores called commissaries. They developed their own scrip or new ways to pay for merchandise for the miners and all too often would inflate the prices. The company also built “camp” houses of poor quality, no plumbing or insulation and a coal stove then rented to the miners for another additional fee. Receipts from the early fifties have shown that a miners take home pay after paying his credits, union dues, tools for the job and other expenses with less than eighty-nine dollars to feed, clothe and raise his family. Some receipts have shown as little as thirty-eight dollars. The communities in the camps were close-knit and quick to help those who became less fortunate for whatever reason. During these hard times miners often turned to other ways to supplement their substandard life and the family’s needs by planting corn and selling it by the gallon after dark. The old folk lore song of “In the Mines, In the Pines where the sun never shines” was sung by miners as the dedicated ones returned day after day, year after year into a dark pit that meant survival for his family and yours. There are many untold stories of the life of coal miners. They were undervalued, underappreciated and were very much underpaid. They are the ones who supplied the fuel for our factories and industries and helped to keep our homes warm during the winter until the turn of the century before new means of energy was affordable.

If you see a coal miner, ask him for a story of what it took to work in the coal mines and thank him for his “dying” contribution to our society.





A Walk In Time...

Past, Present & Future

The Oliver Springs Bottling Company

The Origins of the Enterprise Around 1900, Paul Joseph DeBlieux Jr. established the Oliver Springs Bottling Company on Back Street. The business found its home in a building formerly occupied by the Russell Whiskey Distillery—an outfit that had flourished in the 1880s by serving the local miners and railroad construction crews.

The secret to the beverage's quality remained the same through the decades: the pristine water from the Moses Winters spring. The same source that once fueled the distillery now gave life to DeBlieux's soft drinks.

A Family Legacy The venture was a synergy of two families, the Letoreys and the DeBlieuxs, whose shared history stretched from France to New Orleans. The DeBlieux family brought their background as major Louisiana sugar producers, while the Letoreys provided the manufacturing expertise. Paul himself lived directly across from the plant with his two sisters, Stella and Octavia. To keep operations running, he often hired local boys to wash bottles for fifty cents a day.

The company produced a vibrant array of flavors, including:

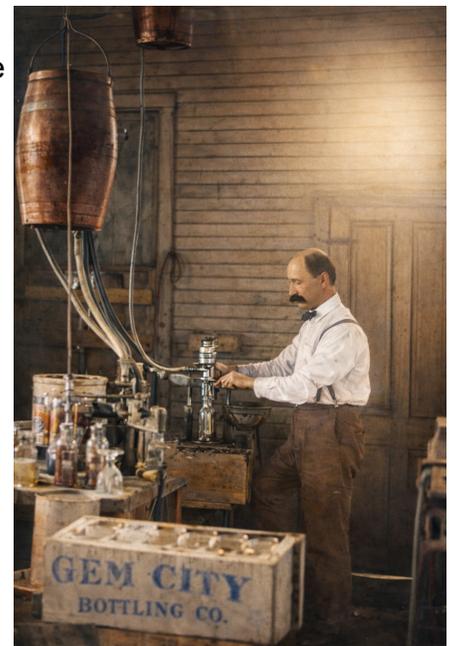
- Fruit Classics:** Strawberry, Lemon, Peach Mellow, Orangeade, Wild Cherry, and Concord Grape.

- Specialties:** Cream Soda, Rasport, Arno-Cola, Ginger Ale, and their signature **3 Star Ginger Ale**.

The Craft (and Danger) of Bottling The bottling process was a rhythmic, physically demanding, and occasionally dangerous task. With his right hand, Paul would set the cap into the machine. His left hand would pull a lever to inject the syrup, followed almost instantly by a hiss of carbonated water. Finally, a sharp stomp on a foot pedal secured the cap. The margin for error was slim; too much pressure often resulted in a "bang" as the glass shattered or lids bent under the strain.

Despite these hazards, the plant turned out thousands of bottles. These drinks were hauled by wagon to the Wind Rock and Big Mountain commissaries and served at the elegant Oliver Springs Hotel.

The End of an Era As the business grew, Paul moved the plant from Back Street to a location near City Hall, though he continued to pipe the original spring water to the new site. The company remained active through 1930, but the combined pressure of the Great Depression and the rising dominance of Coca-Cola eventually brought the era to a close. Today, while the factory is gone, the "scarce" bottles from the Oliver Springs Bottling Company have become highly prized treasures for local collector.





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GENEALOGY
ANCESTRY

Meet our Genealogist, Jimmie Duncan

Jimmie Duncan graduated from Clinton High School in 1963 and entered the U.S. Army after graduation. He was trained on the Nike Hercules missile and was selected to be on the warhead team. He was also trained in Aviation Electronics. After being discharged, he volunteered to return to Vietnam as a civilian contractor with the Department of Defense, performing electronics work on aircraft. While in Vietnam, Jimmie met his future wife.

Jimmie attended college obtaining degrees in Electronics, Mini-Micro Computer Technology and completed course work for computer science. Jimmie worked at all three plants in Oak Ridge where he worked as a computer analyst specializing in mainframe supercomputers and retired from Oak Ridge National Laboratory in 2007.

Jimmie developed a passion for genealogy and local history and is a dedicated researcher and genealogist passionate about connecting people to their roots. He is also setting up a logical, consistent digital filing system to help make family lineages and histories accessible.

Jimmie is committed to maintaining the highest standards of genealogical proof and believes everyone deserves to know their story to reunite families with their heritage.





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"Oliver's Folly"

BY WES LEED

Growing up in Oliver Springs as a child in the 1950's and attending school at Norwood, I never knew that just across the road from the school once stood the large 35-room brick mansion and inn of Richard Oliver. The mansion was built in 1830-1831 on a home tract of 30 acres. When first built, it was known as "Oliver's Folly".

It was located on the stage road from Nashville to Knoxville and Richard planned to take guests by horse and buggy to the nearby mineral springs that were situated at the base of Walden's Ridge. The healing powers of the waters were handed down from the Indians. People were skeptical though that guests would come to fill the large mansion and Inn.

The rooms in the "Folly" were exceedingly large with large fireplaces and rooms large enough to accommodate several beds.



NEWSLETTER TID BITS...

- Last year's newsletters included an Event Calendar for one month. Due to the ever changing events in each month, it was decided that UPDATED calendars will now be found on our website, www.oshistorical.com/calendar. That way you can be up to date on events scheduled for the current month and the next month.
- Just a reminder, membership dues and museum monetary donations can be mailed to the Historical Museum at P.O.Box 409, Oliver Springs, TN 37840.



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OSHS Museum Newsletter Survey

Dear Member,

This is an OSHS Museum Newsletter Survey regarding how you want to receive your Quarterly Newsletter. We would like to know your preference in the way the newsletter is available to you personally.

Each member has three options for our newsletter. **One**, via the website, oshistorical.com, **two** asks if you would like to continue receiving it in the mail and **three** asks if you would like to receive the newsletter by email.

Please take a moment to answer the following selections. It's easy. Just **CIRCLE** the option you are selecting, **CUT OUT** the survey and mail to Oliver Springs Historical Society, P.O. Box [409](#) Oliver Springs, TN [37840](#). Your feedback is valuable to us! **Your choice needs to be submitted before March 31, 2026**, for an idea of how many newsletters need to be mailed out. Thank you for your participation.

Sue Orick, Editor

1. *Which way would you prefer to receive the OSHS Museum Quarterly Newsletter?*
 - a. Via the website (**oshistorical.com**) You will **NOT** receive newsletters in the mail.
 - b. Receive it in the mail as before. Members with no electronic communication obviously will continue to receive the newsletter via US Mail.
 - c. Receive it as **email**. Please have your name and email address written below when you reply.

NAME: _____

EMAIL: _____

GET INVOLVED BE A MEMBER

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 home page. Just click GET INVOLVED. The Historical Society website is www.oshistorical.com.

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

