

Days Of Old Sumner County

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Sumner County Historical Society

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What's New at the Archives?

By Bonnie Martin, Archivist

Sumner County Archives, located at 364 N. Belvedere Dr. in Gallatin, continues to add to its collections, many of which are unique to the county and can only be found here. In 2018, the Archives added Sumner County land grants, a collection of glass photographic negatives and microfilm copies of *the News Examiner* and *Star News*.

The Sumner County Land Grant Project

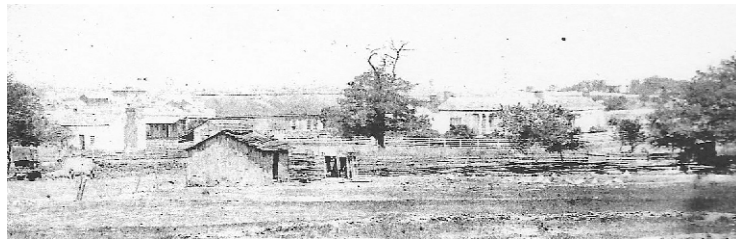
Gallatin businessman, author and historian Jack Masters has donated his Sumner County, Tennessee Land Grant project to the Sumner County Archives for patron research. Masters' project, compiled with assistance from genealogist Shirley Wilson, includes Tennessee Land Grant deed transactions issued for Sumner County after 1806. The project is in addition to North Carolina land grants issued for Sumner County, which are shown in the book "Founding of the Cumberland Settlements."

Masters and Wilson have worked on the project for several years, and now the completed project will identify the earliest land owners of Sumner County by North Carolina and Tennessee land grant recipients. The Archives staff is frequently asked who originally owned the land and where it was located.

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Above is Samuel Nickelson's gold rush coin purse and a locket. Below, is what may be the oldest photograph of Gallatin. Restored by Allen Haynes, it includes the house built in 1856 (upper right) and a store house (upper left). The buildings no longer exist.



Nickelson Family; How Things Return

By Ken Thomson, SCHS President

The recent death of Ann Brown Tue has brought to mind a few rare artifacts that were donated to the Sumner County Museum by she and her sister, Jane Brown Patterson. These were possessions of their Gallatin ancestors, the prominent 19th century Samuel Nickelson family, whose story is below. The artifacts are a gold book-style locket and eight ferrotypes. The museum also houses a coin purse made by Samuel's wife, Darthulia, which he took to the California Gold Rush before their marriage. I purchased the purse at auction for the museum.

Below is the Nickelson family story, most of which appeared in the Nov. 2, 2005, *News Examiner*.

Samuel Nickelson was born into an industrious Massachusetts family in 1814, the son of John and Jane (Willston) Nickelson. According to a descendant, Anna (Nickelson) Blessing of Florida, "They were the embodiment of all that their name implied."

At 7-years-old, Samuel went to Newton Upper Falls, Mass., to learn carding and spinning in a cotton factory. In 1839, he moved to Covington, Ky., and in 1841 became superintendent of a cotton mill in Lebanon, Tenn.

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The pioneers' Station Camp Backwater Road can still be followed if you know where to look.

Searching for Roads Used by Sumner's Early Settlers

By Jack Masters and Bill Puryear

The pioneers who came across the mountains to claim their land grants in Sumner County were a hardy bunch. Most carried warrants in their saddlebags earned for fighting the British at Kings Mountain, Guilford Courthouse and Cowpens in The Revolutionary War, making the British retreat to Yorktown, where they bottled them up and forced them to surrender. These warrants enabled the pioneers to buy land in the rich alluvial soil of Sumner County for as little as \$10 an acre.

Trouble is, this same alluvial soil was rich because it flooded and had for many eons. (How many of you remember, as we, the flooded bottoms where Nashville Pike crossed Mansker Creek at the Davidson County line?) This was the case with Drakes Creek at Hendersonville and at Station Camp. Three tributaries caused it to back up over today's Nashville Pike below Pilots Knob to well above today's Roger's stone quarry. The clay soil of this valley was particularly noted in many early accounts as being too muddy to plant many years, causing settlers to sell their land and move further upriver.

Sumner's pioneers came in carts or wagons drawn by horses or oxen. In this conveyance each man carried his wife, children and all his worldly goods. There were no tow trucks in those

days, and each settler was responsible for the security of his precious family, his team, his wagon, and all his worldly goods. He had to find a better way to travel than through the muddy



This is the view east from Dobbins Pike

creek bottoms: getting mired up might leave them alone and isolated in a muddy bottomland for days or weeks, vulnerable to Indian attacks or further flooding. A way around this hazard had to be found.

Such was the backwater road that circled far north of Gallatin and through the hills. It exited

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the Holston Road up Bledsoe Creek north of Cragfont and followed up Desha's Creek upstream until reaching the second branch feeding into it from the west, at Stan Hitchcock's home today. Following that branch, marked today by an ancient stone wall, through the gap at its head, it descended across Dobbins Pike below Union School house, then southwest across Wallace Road at the old Gillespie place. From there, it was but a short distance to Wallace's Station, the remnant of which is still visible in the huge logs at Terry Bartlett's place, next to the Wallace cemetery and monument.

From there the road descends through Crestview cemetery, crossing Highway 109, crossing a tributary of upper Station Camp Creek at a shallow rock ford just below Salem Methodist Church. The road then continues southwest until it joins a modern road passing in front of Andrew Finney's house, then crossing Douglass Pike and passing in front of the old Oak Haven house of the late Wade and Cullen Douglass. Here the road passes just south of the home of Reason Bowie, father of Jim Bowie of Alamo fame, who invented the large knife bearing his name.



The road passes in front of the Old Douglass Place.

From here the road continues southwest through the property of Billy Green and Pat Foster to Liberty Lane where it intersects Red River Pike. It follows Liberty as it passes the Flynn place and winds through the hills, fording the main branch of Station Camp and down it to the first County Courthouse at Ocana. Here, having skirted the flooded bottomlands, it joins Long Hollow Pike which leads on to Goodlettsville, crossing upper Drakes and Mansker.

This old road is visible in spots, but should not be accessed without the landowner's permission.



Above is the view north where Backwater Road crosses shallow ford on Station Camp Creek.



This is the view east on Backwater Road on the property of Mitchell Ray in front of the Andrew Finney House, continuing from the Wade Douglass house.

For complete interactive maps and splendid pictures, copy and paste the following link in your browser:

<http://www.cumberlandpioneers.com/scbwr.html>

The more that is learned by exploring this old road, the more its historical significance becomes clear. Sumner County was, after all, the first stop for the pioneers. James Robertson's party, which beat the Donelson river boats to Nashville by several years, stabled their horses within Masker's Fort enroute to Nashville a year earlier.

Throughout the Middle Tennessee drainage, the problem of farming and crossing muddy winter passages became significant, due to the backup of water from the river into the lower creeks. In Hendersonville, for example, you may recall a few years ago when the waters backed up so far that Pope John Paul II School was entirely cut off and only reachable by a TV camera crew in a boat. The backwater road there made a long circuitous climb from Anderson Lane across Two Mile Pike across Willie Rice's place and Twelve Stones Golf Course and through upper Moss Wright Park to Mansker's Station.

Political General Felix Zollicoffer: Well Known in Sumner

By Al Dittes

Of all the soldiers serving in the Portland area during the Civil War, Confederate Gen. Felix Zollicoffer was the most famous—even though he only commanded troops here from the spring of 1861 at the outbreak of the war until the following July. At that time, his superiors transferred him to command the East Tennessee flank, and he died the following January.

Since the Federals controlled Middle Tennessee during most of the war, the only local soldier to make a lasting name was guerrilla raider Ellis Harper.

Zollicoffer was a political general, commissioned because he had excelled in politics and journalism and could command the respect of Middle Tennesseans. Placing him in charge of Camp Trousdale made it easier to recruit Confederate soldiers from Sumner County. The camp initially thrived under his leadership with no battles fought. He got in over his head in Eastern Kentucky and met a strange and tragic ending.

Zollicoffer: Teen Journalist

Felix Kirk Zollicoffer was born on May 19, 1812, in Maury County, Tenn. Though he did not become as famous as James Knox Polk, a fellow native of that region, he did become influential in Tennessee politics.

His father, John Jacob Zollicoffer, operated a successful plantation near Columbia and gave him the best advantages of his day. His grandfather, George Zollicoffer, had been a captain in the Revolutionary War and had been awarded a land grant in Tennessee.

Felix Zollicoffer's journalism career began in 1829, when at age 17 he helped start a newspaper in Paris, Tenn., called the *Western District Herald*. It was a good effort, but the enterprise failed. West Tennessee generated little news, and, in their inexperience, the *Herald's* two teenage editors made the error of trying to fill the columns by copying stories from other newspapers. They did not support political parties or embark on crusades.

Young Felix Zollicoffer returned home to Columbia strapped with a \$2,000 debt and the resolve to do better.

His Road to Journalistic Success

He tried journalism again in Knoxville under the direction of Frederick S. Heiskell, influential Democratic editor of the *Knoxville Register*. Heiskell supported Jacksonian Democracy and taught Felix how to make the newspaper reflect the issues and concerns of the community.

Zollicoffer came back to Columbia in 1834 knowing how to make his weight felt. He was bold enough to defy Andrew Jackson by supporting Tennessean Hugh Lawson White for the Democratic party nomination in 1836 instead of Martin Van Buren of New York. He built a solid reputation as editor of the *Columbia Observer*, then moved on to edit the *Nashville Republican Banner* in 1842, the most prominent Whig newspaper in the state.

He Steps Into Politics

He excelled in Nashville by supporting and sustaining the state Whig Party. His active involvement in the issues of his day helped him to win election to the Tennessee State Senate in 1849 and to the U.S. House of Representatives.



An artist rendering of Felix Zollicoffer

"He was an effective, hard-working editor who became prominent because of his devotion to principles and party," according to an article in the 1969 winter *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*. "Zollicoffer did not single-handedly revive or sustain the Whig party in Tennessee, but he was one of the stronger rocks upon which the party edifice was erected. He made many valuable contacts and established himself as a man who

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could be trusted to support party principles-- factors which proved beneficial in his successful campaigns for the Tennessee Senate and the United States Congress."

In the legislature, he voted on a variety of issues, such as the turnpike companies, the selection of a design and architect for the state capitol, chartering a railroad company, establishing state laws, a medical school and prison reform.

Zollicoffer Goes to Congress

He won the Nashville district congressional seat in 1853 and represented Smith, Sumner and Davidson counties for the next six years. Not being able to write his powerful editorials in Washington, Zollicoffer never did become nationally prominent, but he did work with some famous contemporaries of his day.

Zollicoffer wanted to maintain peace between North and South. He worked hard for the moderation candidate in the 1860 presidential election, his personal friend, John Bell of Tennessee, who ran on the Constitutional Unionist party ticket. Abraham Lincoln won instead, leaving Zollicoffer to realize the inevitability of war.

The Governor of Tennessee accepted Zollicoffer's offer of military service and (despite his meager combat experience) gave him a place as brigadier general in first the Provisional Army of Tennessee and then in the Confederate army. His first assignment led him to Camp Trousdale in northern Sumner County. The Thomas Buntin mansion was his headquarters.

He soon left to take charge in East Tennessee, a hotbed of Unionist sympathy requiring more use of his diplomatic skills than military force.

Zollicoffer's popularity across the state helped him succeed at his new post. He quickly fortified the Cumberland Gap in southeastern Kentucky to try to prevent Union troops from coming into East Tennessee. He asked for permission to move

against the enemy. The result was the Battle of Mill Springs on Fishing Creek in January, 1862.

Zollicoffer made the mistake of crossing the Cumberland River, hoping Confederate boats would supply his poorly equipped troops. That didn't happen, and the Union army was ready for battle. In confused fighting on a murky, overcast day, the troops fired on their own men. Zollicoffer rode to the line of fire to clear things up and in the confusion, wound up talking to a Union officer. When it became apparent who Zollicoffer was, a Union soldier shot him dead.

The Federals won, a major victory overshadowed a short time later by General Ulysses S. Grant capture of Forts Henry and Donelson on the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers. The Confederates had to abandon Nashville.

Gen. Felix Zollicoffer lies buried in the Nashville City Cemetery, the first prominent Tennessean to die in battle after helping Sumner County prepare for The Civil War.



Tomb of Confederate Gen. Felix Zollicoffer

School Boards Have History of Cooperation

By Paula Shannon

It is no secret that cooperation between the Sumner and Robertson County School Boards has been going on a long time. 31W (also called the Louisville Nashville Pike, Gallatin Road and Nashville Pike) literally splits the counties with Sumner on one side of the road and Robertson on the other side. In fact, the location of the lines is still confusing. Many Portland addresses, gas, waterlines and roads are in Robertson County. One night on the television news I heard a reporter say they were reporting from Robertson County on the ridge, but they were clearly standing at a location in Sumner County.

Joint school board meeting minutes, dating back 90 or more years ago, provide interesting insight into the ways the Sumner.Robertson boards cooperated and shaped the school systems. Some names that appear in these minutes are still recognizable today.

In the **June 3rd, 1921**, minutes it was directed that the students at Mitchellville be allowed to go to Sumner County if proper arrangements could be made for transportation.

On **March 28, 1923**, joint members of Sumner County and Robertson County school boards voted to make White House a four.year high school and to hire a domestic science teacher for the school at \$450 to be split between the counties. These same minutes noted that Broom Sedge school (then a "colored" school in Sumner County) had 19 pupils from Sumner and 13 from Robertson County, and that Mitchellville school had 129 students, 22 from Robertson County.

On **March 15, 1924**, a committee of the Sumner County School Board, composed of T.W. Hunter and Esq. Groves, came before the Robertson County School Board asking for \$1,500 for Mitcheville school to pay for the Robertson County children attending that school. It was agreed that Sumner County should report the average attendance of the Robertson County students and that the board would allow prorata funds attending the Mitchellville school from Robertson County. This prorata would also be used to pay their transportation.

The **Dec. 9 1926**, minutes reported that the Sumner County Board had abandoned Shorts School and that Robertson County would pay J. E. Link \$36 a month to transport Robertson County students to Portland and to Buntin Spring.

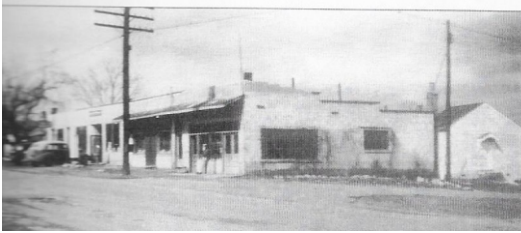
On **April 22, 1932**, a letter was sent from the Sumner County Board to the Robertson County Board to change the teachers at White House.

On **May 10, 1932**, the Robertson and Sumner County Boards met at Cherry Mound at the Masonic Hall to select the teachers for White House. The principal selected was T.N. Towry of Cedar Hill. Others selected as teachers were: H.H. Bryant and Bessie Farthing. Other positions were to be filled by Supt. W.T. Hardison and Supt. McNeely. Elementary teachers selected were: Louise Lawrence, Eva Barry, J.F. Roaden, Lillian Clark, Mrs. Frankie Benson.

On **Aug. 16, 1933**, a joint session of the boards agreed that each county should nominate four teachers whose salaries would be paid by both counties. Sumner Board made the first nomination consisting of Mr. T.N. Towry, principal, Miss Mildred Willis, Mrs. J.E. Roaden and Mrs. Fred Lawrence. They also nominated Miss Miller to teach for Sumner and Mr. H.H. Bryant on condition that funds could be secured to pay his salary. Robertson County nominated Miss Besse Farthing, Mrs. John T. Hale, Mrs. Thelma Erwin and Mrs. Lillian Clark.

On **June 4, 1935**, Sumner and Robertson County Boards of Education met in joint session at the high school building in Portland at 1:30 p.m. with the following Sumner County members present: Mr. J. C. Nichols, chairman; L. A. Absher, Harris Freeland, Dr. R.M. Buchanan and R. T. Shoulders. The Robertson County members present were: F. B. Soyars, Willard Sanders, and Hugh Woodard. Mr. R. T. Fisher, Sumner County Supt and C. F. Fisher, Robertson County Supt. Were also present.

The following motion@was presented. Section I. Be it resolved @that teachers to be selected for the teaching positions in White House School be non.residents of White House and that no teacher shall be selected who resides in close proximity to the White House school@Section II. Be it further resolved that no teacher shall be selected who is closely related to members of the local board at White House and as far as is consistently possible that teachers be selected who are not related in any close relationship to citizens of the White House community.



This group of buildings on Hendersonville's Main Street housed the Post Office, the office of Dr. J.H. Stephens and the general store. Located at the corner of Old Shackle Island Road in the 1940s, these buildings were replaced by Freed's Hardware and Stewart's Five and Dime. The photo was from the collection of Quinton Coppage.

Old Main Street Remembered

*Editor's Note: In his 2009 book, **Remember When, Hendersonville High School coach and history teacher Jim Lind provided a verbal picture in addition to photographs of Hendersonville's Main Street circa 1935-1940. He wrote:***

It's a quiet afternoon on Main Street—called Nashville Pike—a twolane gravel road between Nashville and Gallatin. Trees border the road; there are only a few utility poles, carrying electricity and telephone lines to area homes (by 1938, there are 87 phones in Hendersonville). There are no neon signs, billboards, street signs, or lights. There's almost no traffic.

A few horses, a buggy and a car are lined up outside "The Store" at the intersection of Old Shackle Island Road on the south side of Main Street. Inside, some shoppers catch up on the news around the wood stove as they wait for Sam Bloodworth to get up their orders. Sam sells general merchandise on one side; Mrs. J.H.

Stephens runs the dry goods store on the other side. Her husband, Doc Stephens, is seeing to a broken arm at the office next door. The tiny post office is next to the doctor's office. The Bank of Hendersonville is in the adjacent building.



This 1930 view of Main St. (facing east) shows the double pitched roofs of Bloodworth's. The brick building with white porch is the Bank of Hendersonville (later Volunteer State Bank).

The quiet of the afternoon is broken by a toot of the horn from a Model T as it pulls out of the Shell Service Station on the way to Nashville. It passes the Interurban coach which rumbles to a halt. After the passengers disembark, the conductor pitches off a stack of Nashville newspapers.

When the coach heads back from Gallatin, it will be loaded with boisterous high school students coming home from classes in Gallatin.

An occasional spring wagon—loaded down with corn, oats, or other product—rolls up the scales behind the store and then heads on down Shackle Island Road to the depot to ship their goods to Nashville and beyond. A small cloud of black dust rises from a carload of coal being dumped into the coal yard next to the depot.

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The Archives will have available maps of land grants overlaid on a modern map of Sumner County. In addition to the maps, patrons will be able to examine an allname index and files of related research material.

The project is the only known work of its kind in Tennessee and an invaluable source for original land transfers in Sumner County.

E.M. Stark glass plate negatives

The Archives has archived more than 1,500 glass plate negatives photographs, now available for public viewing. The charming photographs of Sumner County families date from 1905 through the 1920's. Several patrons have been surprised

to discover great grandparents or other ancestors in the photographs. Your family may be there too!

Sumner County Historical Society purchased the archival supplies, and DAR volunteers and others cleaned and added identifying descriptions to negatives. Allen Haynes of Gallatin photographed the negatives and enhanced the images. Haynes' photographs were inverted from negative to positive photos and scanned for public viewing.

Newspaper Collection additions

The Sumner County Archives has acquired all available microfilmed *News Examiner* newspapers dating to December 2013 and microfilm for the Hendersonville Star News from 1961 to 2011.

Juanita Swann: Portland's Newspaper Lady

By Paula Shannon

Writer's Note: My thanks to John Franklin Swann and Conrad Swann for the information about their family.

A little more than 60 years ago, the *Portland Leader* newspaper opened its doors, and it remains a stalwart force in Portland today. Its founders, the late John and Juanita Haner Swann, are still remembered. Juanita wrote columns for nearly a decade, leaving the town a day-to-day record of Portland from 1959 to 1969. This is her story.

Juanita Haner was born on Dec. 18, 1914, in Waco, Texas, to Earl Haner, and Marietta Dobbs Haner, both originally from Kentucky. The 1920 Census reports that Earl Haner, 29; Mary Haner, 29; Juanita Haner, 5; and Earl D. Haner, 1, had moved to Nashville. They were listed as Roomers under the name John L. Bostick.

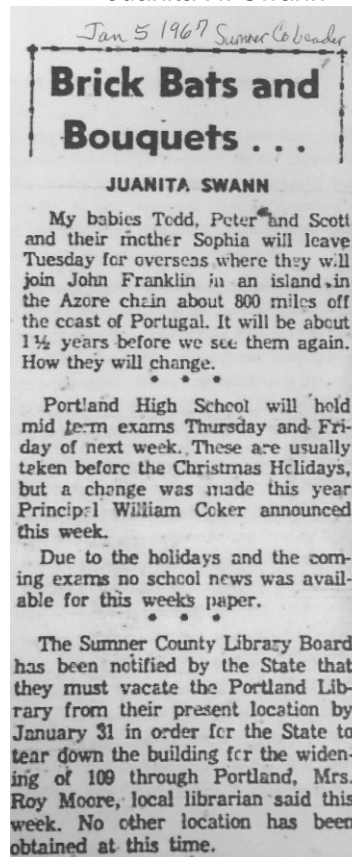
Juanita was only 15 when she married, John Swann, on July 17, 1930. Ten years later, the 1940 census shows the couple living with his father and mother, Neely and Addie Lane Swann, on Rail Road Ave in Portland. At this time, they had one child named John Franklin Swann. In 1940, John W. Swann's occupation was listed as Pressman. At some point, Juanita sold ads for the *Gallatin Examiner*, and John worked in Springfield.

When Wilkinson and Wiseman built a funeral home on Hwy. 109 South in 1958, the Swanns moved their print business to where the funeral home had been—downtown Portland next to Lisa Davis' Mercantile where the *Portland Leader* is now. It was named Arrow Printing. Here they printed a local weekly newspaper first called the *Sumner County Leader*.

The first edition of the *Sumner County Leader* came out on Oct 30, 1958. The Swans' son, Conrad, remembers pouring perfume into the inkwell of the cylinder press for first edition printing. Juanita's first column was published in this paper on Nov. 12, 1959, and was headlined "Bricks



Juanita H. Swann



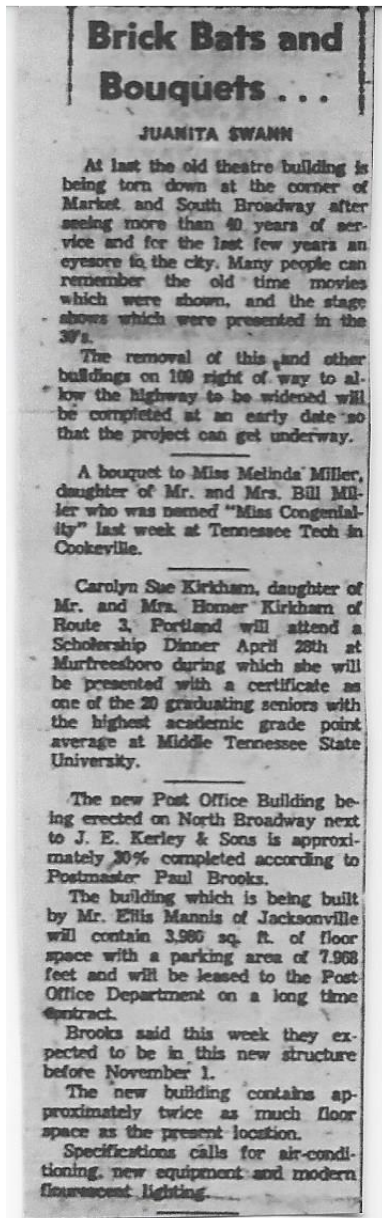
This is a Jan. 5, 1967 column

and Bouquets." It wasn't a true weekly column because sometimes it was not in the paper for three weeks or so, but it was a regular column.

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(LADY, Continued from Page 8)

Juanita's second column, Nov 26, 1959, was renamed to the familiar "Brick Bats and Bouquets," now fondly remembered. Conrad said that he believes she named her column "Brick Bats and Bouquets" to note local "naughty and nice" items with fairness and decorum. (In fact, I remember Ms. Juanita calling our house, asking for news to put in the column.)



April 20, 1967 column

Between 1959 and July 1968, she wrote 254 columns for the *Sumner County Leader*. The column talked about everything from news about Portland, Sumner County High School and Easter Seals to stories about local farmers. Juanita wrote a column in the 1980s called "Remembering Portland," which is a good source of local history. **(Writer's Note: I copied all of the columns from 1959 to 1968 that I could find and put them in a binder at the Bailey Museum at the Portland Public Library. More columns probably exist. I also copied and am retyping "Remembering Portland." The whole collection of newspapers can be seen on microfilm at the Portland Public Library. Unfortunately, some back issues of the newspaper were lost.)**

John and Juanita retired from the newspaper about 1975 and sold the paper to a corporation headquartered in Henderson, Ky. The *Sumner County Leader* became the *Portland Leader* at that time.

Juanita was a very active lady in the Portland community. She was a member of the Dogwood Hills Garden Club, the Rotary Club, Portland Chamber of Commerce, McKendree Memorial Methodist Church and the Eastern Star.

After John passed away, March 18, 1986, Juanita moved to a senior living complex in Beavercreek, Ohio, near her son, John, and wife Sophia. She stayed there about 10 years until her health began to fail. She then went to Kure, N.C. in 2003 to live with Conrad and his wife Betty. She was 87. She moved with them to Wilmington, N.C. the next year and died there on Sept. 28, 2003, at age 88. She and her husband are buried in Maple Hill Cemetery, Portland.

When asked about their mother, John said, "She was a marvelous, wonderful woman." Conrad said, "John W. [his dad] was the captain of the ship [the newspaper], but Juanita was the wind beneath the sails."

(RETURN, Continued from Page 1)

He joined the California Gold Rush of 1849 and worked the gold mines for three years. His lady love made him a going away gift, a coin purse embroidered with her name, D.V. Phipps, and his, S. Nickelson, inside the flap. Darthulia Virginia Phipps had met Samuel in her native Wilson County, Tenn., where she lived with her parents, William R.D. Phipps and his second wife, Elizabeth Cummings.

Samuel returned from the gold mines in 1852 and married Darthulia. They moved to Pulaski, Tenn., where he manufactured cotton goods until 1864, near the close of the Civil War, when he—looking for a more promising economic future—returned with his family to his native Massachusetts. Here he found immediate success and prosperity.



Samuel and Darthulia Nickelson

In April 1865, when President Lincoln was killed by John Wilkes Booth, Northerners embraced the deep mourning customs of the day—except for Darthulia. She was a “Southern Belle,” nurtured in a different sociological and political venue. All of Samuel’s Massachusetts family wore black arm bands, all of them, that is, but Darthulia. This was proof to Samuel that his wife was unable to adjust to Massachusetts society. He and Darthulia decided to move back to Tennessee.

In 1867, the family bought a brick house on North Water St. (now Avenue) in Gallatin. The house had been built in 1857 by Major Smith Mundy.

Historians think that Sam’s brother, Jonas Nickelson, influenced him to settle in Gallatin. Jonas had come to Gallatin in 1852 and purchased a foundry and machine works three years later. Another brother, Thomas W. Nickelson, accompanied Sam and Darthulia to Gallatin and assisted him in establishing Eagle Woolen Mills. Thomas eventually returned home.

Samuel’s family grew and prospered. He and Darthulia had seven children: Albert (1853), William R.D.(1855), Samuel (1861), Leola (1863), twins Ophelia Elizabeth and Victoria Elvira (1864) and Edwin (1868).

When Samuel died in 1877, his eldest son, Albert, became superintendent of the Eagle Woolen Mill. Another son, Samuel, was an

employee. William R.D. was pursuing degrees in medicine and pharmacy at Vanderbilt University.

Samuel and Darthulia were Baptists, but their children were members of Gallatin’s First Presbyterian. Albert became the organist and choir director. He married Hattie B. Saunders.

William R.D. was the darling of the family. He lived in Arkansas and endeared himself as a beloved physician. He spent his money caring for the needs of others. It is said that he never sent a patient a bill. At age 49, he married Mary Elizabeth Curlen, and they had one child, William R.D., Jr. He aspired to follow in his father’s footsteps at Vanderbilt, but when he graduated from Van Buren High School his father was 68 years old and ill. Due to reduced finances, William, Jr., instead accepted an appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy. He graduated in 1927, just prior to his father’s death. In a few years, he became a Rear Admiral. He married Helen Aimen of Philadelphia. Their children were William, R.D. III, and Anna Mary.

The Nickelson Daughters

Ophelia, was the only Nickelson daughter who managed to marry. Darthulia was very possessive of her three girls. When Leola and Victoria tried to marry, she took to her bed, crying until they called off their engagements.

The Nickelson home on North Water had double parlors. The twins, Ophelia and Victoria, would each have a date, one in each parlor. They always dressed alike and some evenings would excuse themselves and swap dates, unbeknownst to their gentlemen friends. When Ophelia married Ira Wright King, she and her twin both got wedding dresses and trousseaus. Both wore their wedding dresses, and Victoria accompanied the happy couple on their honeymoon. Their great niece, Anna Nickelson Blessing, said that Ira was considered a saint for putting up with the sisterhood.

In 1904, Darthulia died. Edwin, Leola and Victoria bought the homeplace from their siblings. When Edwin died in 1918, the sisters were forced to sell their home of 51 years. Their great niece, Mary Frances Brown, then about eight, lived with them. She was the daughter of Hattie Byron King and granddaughter of their sister Ophelia.

Hattie had married Newton Edward Brown in November of 1909, and Frances came into their lives nine months and seven days later. The challenges of this teenage union were overwhelming, and they soon divorced. Hattie wished to pursue a career in Chicago. She left her small daughter for her aunts to rear.

Due to their financial distress, Leola, Victoria and little Frances moved to Nashville to live with their niece, Victoria Ophelia King, who supported them in comfort for their rest of their long lives.

Leola lived into her 95th year and Victoria Elvira into her 90th. At the age of 18, Frances fulfilled a lifetime dream and joined her mother, then married to Claude W. Poe, in Chicago.

At age 20 in 1931, Frances married her first husband, Allen G. Tannehill. The marriage lasted seven years. She then married Kenneth Ross Atwood, and within two years they were divorced.

Five years later while in Mexico, Frances met the love of her life. It must have been love at first sight for they were soon married in El Paso, Texas. Solomon Maurice Solares was five years her junior. This match lasted 60 years until he died in September 2004. She could not survive without him. She died two months later at age 94.

In the 1960s, she sold her apartment houses in Chicago and briefly moved to Wisconsin. She was apparently dissatisfied. She drove through Illinois in search of an old spacious brick house, which she found in Farina.

Here she and Maurice lived out the final 40 or so years of their lives as recluses. They had few friends, but they regularly attended local auctions, yard sales and flea markets. She was a compulsive buyer, thus filling their house from floor to ceiling with everything imaginable.

Frances' death opened a Pandora's box. She had told friends that she had no family. Weeks passed, and no one appeared to process her estate. In Illinois, if a person dies intestate indebted to someone that person (or persons) can file for papers of administration. The funeral director filed these papers and hired an attorney, Mark Haney, to handle legal matters.

A search was conducted to find her nearest relatives. To the amazement of everyone involved, it was discovered that Frances had two living half sisters. Jane (Brown) Patterson of Georgia was the daughter of Newton E. Brown, Hattie's first husband, and his second wife, Theodocia Lewis of Gallatin. Jane had known Frances when they were young and had even visited her in Chicago. In the 1950s, they lost contact. Another half sister, Ann (Brown) Tue of Tennessee was the child of Newton E. Brown and his third wife, Carolyn Parton of Coffee County. Unlike her sister Jane, Ann had never met Frances. Her mother had not wanted her to know that her father had married three times and had divorced his first wife.

When they learned about Frances' estate, both Jane and Ann were overcome. Jane said, "This is all becoming an unusual event in my late life, an extended fairy tale."

Newton Edward Brown was a descendant of the founding families of Tennessee, and his great-great-grandfather, Robert Cartwright, was the founder of Goodlettsville. He began his

professional life as a paper hanger but soon became a conductor and brakeman on the Gallatin-Nashville Interurban. He retired in 1949 after losing an arm while working for another railroad. He then moved to Coffee County and lost a leg in a freak accident while burning brush.

The Gallatin Connection

Frances and her aunts left Gallatin more than 80 years ago. The last link between the Nickelson family and Gallatin was Queen Victoria (Bowers) Bransford who was born into the Nickelson household in 1892 and died in 1989. Her mother, Mary Bowers, had been employed by Darthulia Nickelson. **(Writer's Note: On a visit in 1980 to "Miss Vic," I asked her the origin of her name. She proudly responded, "I was named by and after Miss Victoria Elvira Nickelson.")**

As Frances grew up in Gallatin, she played with many neighbors, including Grace Adele Anderson (1908-2003) and Amelia Allen (Woodson) Turner (1907-1994). Mary Elizabeth (Baskerville) Gregory was [in 2005] the lone neighbor who remembered Frances and her great aunts. She recalled that they took little Frances for afternoon walks on North Water St.

The Amazing Returned Relics

Working on Frances' estate, Haney called the legal firm of Harsh & Harsh in Gallatin, inquiring about an appropriate repository for her historical pictures and other documents. Haney sent a photo of Samuel and another of Samuel's Eagle Woolen Mills, c. 1870, then the oldest known photo of Gallatin. **(Writer's Note: Mark Haney's foresight kept precious items from being lost to our history, and we thank him.)**

Frances' two half sisters, Jane B. Patterson and Ann Tue, went further, giving Sumner County Museum a gold book-style locket that belonged to Darthulia Nickelson and contained eight ferrotypes of the Samuel Nickelson family. At a 2005 auction to settle Frances' estate, items from four generations of the family were sold. I bought the gold rush coin purse made by Darthulia for Samuel and other historical treasures for the museum and Sumner County Archives.



2005, Ann (Brown) Tue at left donates the Nickelson locket and Ken Thomson donates the 1849 Gold Rush coin purse to Sumner Co. Museum. Accepting is Juanita Frazor (center) then museum coordinator.

Sumner County Historical Society

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To: