Tuesday, March 3, 2020

Local & Area News

◆ TODAY IS SUPER TUESDAY PRIMARY
Voters across Tennessee will go to the polls today for Super Tuesday voting. It is the day for the Republican and Democratic presidential preference primary, the county Republican and Democratic primary, and the voters who live in McMinn County (but not in the city of Athens) will be able to vote for or against a .75% increase in the local option sales tax. Here in McMinn County, the polls will be open from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. You must vote at your assigned polling place.

◆ FEBRUARY WAS A RAINY MONTH
Athens Utilities Board recorded 12.85 inches of rain in February. The most rain in one 24-hour period was 3.87 inches on February 6th. AUB measured 2.25 inches of snow on February 9th. The highest temperature in February was 73 and the lowest was 22 degrees.

◆ COMMUNITY NEWS YOU CAN USE:
✓ The monthly PTSD Support Group meets tonight from 6:30 to 8:30 at Athens Lutheran Church. If you have questions, call 744-1605.
✓ Athens Lutheran Church will have midweek Wednesday Lenten Services starting tomorrow, March 4th, at 7 p.m. The church will provide dinner at 6 p.m. prior to the services. All are welcome.

Etowah Gets Rural Funding

The Etowah Historical Commission and the City of Etowah recently received federal funds from USDA Rural Development. The funds supported the Historical Commission’s new exhibits and improvements to the interior of the L&N Depot. Jim Tracy, Tennessee Director for USDA Rural Development, toured the Depot last week to see the results of the funding. Tracy was accompanied by Chris Hampton (Area Director for Middle Tennessee), and Kris Battle (Area Director for Southeast Tennessee). Linda Caldwell with Tennessee Overhill sent us this photo showing: (L-R) Etowah Mayor Burke Garwood and Jim Tracy.
Standing on Hwy 11 between Athens and Niota, the old Cleage House rises above the highway like an old gravestone, the old abandoned house having recently been used as a Halloween attraction. The brick home was built and designed by Samuel Cleage, a traveling builder from Virginia who settled in McMinn County about 1823. Cleage’s slaves were master brick makers, evident in the long-lasting buildings that remain today in and around Athens.

East Tennessee has clay that lends itself to brick-making. Cleage’s slaves would dig the clay for the buildings on site, and mix it with sand and mussel shells brought in wagon loads from the Hiwassee River. The slaves would slap handfuls of the wet brick mixture into a brick mold, and today crescent-shaped wrinkles are visible in the bricks where air pockets were baked into the bricks. The remarkable bricks made by Cleage’s slaves are still visible in such buildings as the Cleage House, Mars Hill Church and the old Railroad Office on Jackson Street in Athens, the Rice House on Madison Avenue in Athens, and the Cate House in Niota.

Cleage freed his slaves at the time of his death in 1850, and these freemen became some of the first black business owners in McMinn County prior to the Civil War. Many white and black families in our area are descended from these master craftsmen and entrepreneurs.

(Joe Guy is the McMinn County Historian)