

Tennesseans on the Move

Massive historical project concludes with publication of third atlas of the Cumberland Settlements Story by Trish Milburn

One of the greatest tragedies of history is when that history is lost. That's why one could view historians as heroes. They work long hours with dedication to accuracy and minute details to ensure that the stories of our shared history aren't lost to the passage of time. Some of these historians are professionals who have degrees in history and teach at colleges, who write books that hit the New York Times bestseller list. But they aren't the only ones out there day after day preserving the history of America's nooks and crannies. Sometimes it's people like Jack Masters and Bill Puryear, who have harnessed their passion for a specific slice of that history.

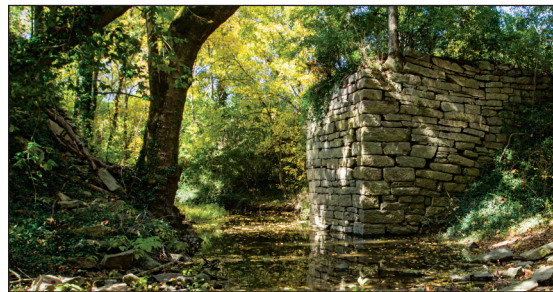
Masters' and Puryear's names may sound familiar since we featured them before in *The Tennessee Magazine* when they published the first two volumes chronicling the history of the Cumberland Settlements. This fall marks the release of the third volume of the well-received series, "The First Southwest: The Third Atlas, The Cumberland and Duck River Settlements." The book explores the expansion of settlement to the south and west. Topics explored include ones familiar to any

student of American history: the War of 1812, President Andrew Jackson and westward expansion. All of these are covered with a uniquely Tennessee perspective.

Puryear says this project has been "very interesting" as he and Masters were "documenting and narrating the leading role Tennessee (the most southwestern of the states in 1800) and Tennesseans played in expanding the United States to the Gulf, to the Rio Grande and to the Pacific Ocean."

"Tennessee's role has never been adequately recognized in history books," he adds.

At first glance, one might appreciate the effort that has gone into producing this book as well as the two volumes that preceded it. It's not until you read about how very much time and effort went into their production that you really marvel at what Masters and Puryear have done. According to their own words in the opening, they have dedicated seven of their retirement years to this project. That's seven years



Stone abutments mark the former site of a bridge the U.S. government built across Brown Creek in 1801 to facilitate travel on the Natchez Trace, a trail critical to settlers in Tennessee.

of walking old roads and trails that have almost been erased by time and weather, digging up relics once used by our ancestors and reading microfilm until their eyes likely crossed. What's truly astounding is the fact that they've read more than 8,000 land surveys and transcribed nearly half of them as well as many more thousand military pay records, deeds for property and slaves, wills and genealogical records and countless pages of old books.

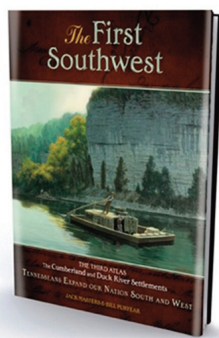
It seems as though reading all that material would have taken seven years — to say nothing of the writing of the three books that have resulted from all that research. And all that work hasn't gone unnoticed, as evidenced by the reviews the books have received.

"Once in a great while a book comes along that is so outstanding with so much time and dedication invested in it by its authors that it causes others to stand in awe," wrote Shirley Wilson, retired director of the Sumner County Archives, in her review.

So how would the authors themselves describe this journey if they only had one word to do so?

"Exhilarating," Masters says.

Puryear quickly follows by saying, "Rewarding, in the sense of time travel



Explore it for yourself

For more information, including how to order your own copy of "The First Southwest," call 615-330-9013, visit www.cumberlandpioneers.com or contact The Book Foundry by emailing info@thebookfoundry.com.