

Pumpkin Center notables share portion of their estate with the community

Written by Administrator

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This story originally appeared in the May 27th issue of The Bedford Times Mail. It was written by Roger Moon.

Two of Orange County's most widely known and celebrated historical figures, Pumpkin Center's Add and Mabel Gray, have made a lasting impact by leaving much of their estate to the community.

Their overall gift, part of which has gone to Orange County and part of which has gone to Washington County, is especially meaningful with the arrival of Memorial Day because a portion of the money from the late couple's estate has been earmarked for cemetery care.

The funds will be administered through the Orange County Community Foundation and the Washington County Community Foundation. The governing boards for each of the two foundations received checks — \$448,000 for Orange and \$224,005 for Washington — earlier this spring from Salem's Shirley Batt, a niece of the Grays. Batt oversaw the trust from which the foundation donations came.

"Mabel's favorite holiday was Memorial Day, when she and the family would visit cemeteries to place flowers on the graves of loved ones," OCCF Executive Director Imojean Dedrick said. The list of cemeteries included Paoli Community, Stampers Creek and Mount Pleasant cemeteries in Orange County, as well as Crown Hill and Livonia cemeteries in Washington County. All of those cemeteries will benefit from money donated to the foundations through the Grays' estate.

Dedrick has fond memories of growing up near — and visiting — the Pumpkin Center general store that the Grays operated east of Paoli and just a few miles north of State Road 56. Pumpkin Center came to be regarded as much more than a store. It became a museum that attracted the locals and the not-so-locals, and was referred to affectionately by many people as simply Punk. Add opened the original store in 1922. In 1933, he tore it down and built the present building. In 1934, he married Mabel Batt, who left Washington County and came to live and work at Pumpkin Center.

During the subsequent years, the two amassed a collection of pieces — many odd or unique — that adorned the walls, floor and even the ceiling of the store. Add died in 1988, but Mabel continued to operate the store and museum until her health deteriorated and she moved to Heritage House in Salem in early 2006. During a three-day auction in July 2006 the contents of the store were sold and consequently scattered across the country. Earl

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WCCF . . .

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Cornwell Sr., the auctioneer, said at the time that at least 10,000 items would go to the top bidders.

Visitors to the store — and to the subsequent auction — saw an array of thingamajigs and whirligigs that Add had put together. "Add was always making some kind of contraption," Batt said when presenting the check to the OCCF.

Mabel died in January 2012, about six months short of what would have been her 100th birthday.

Dedrick, in announcing the Grays' gift, said, "Add and Mabel cared so deeply for their community and through their legacy proved they cared not only for the towns they lived in but for a much larger area of southern Indiana and Kentucky."

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Dedrick provided a breakdown for the Grays' gift:

n Orange County (40 percent of the estate): In addition to the three cemeteries listed for Orange County (each of which will receive \$1,000 a year for 10 years), funds administered through the OCCF will go, each year for 10 years, to Indiana University Health Paoli Hospital, \$2,000; Kosair Children's Hospital in Louisville, \$500; Riley Children's Hospital in Indianapolis, \$500, and the American Heart Association, \$250.

n Washington County (20 percent of the estate): In addition to the two cemeteries listed for Washington County (each of which will receive \$1,000 a year for 10 years), funds administered through the WCCF will go, each year for 10 years, to Indiana University Health Bedford Hospital, \$500 a year; the American Cancer Society, \$250 a year; the Ronald McDonald House in Louisville, \$250 a year, and the Alzheimer's Association, \$250 a year.

Dedrick said, "In addition to these pass-through funds that will benefit for a period of 10 years, the two foundations will endow several thousands of dollars that are unrestricted and will benefit both our counties for years to come."

In meeting with the Orange County foundation's board of directors and before handing over the \$448,000 check, Batt also displayed a few of the items that she had kept from the Pumpkin Center museum, including some of the many pencils that Add and Mabel had enjoyed collecting. Batt also shared some of her memories of Pumpkin Center, including the fact she often would accompany her aunt and uncle and their burros in local parades.

Judy Johnson, executive director of the WCCF, accompanied Batt when she met with the OCCF board, and said of the Grays, "They were very eclectic, and interested in so many things."

Dedrick said, "They had tremendous impact. ... It (the store) was just such an important part of my childhood."

She continued, "Shirley has been remarkable to work with."

Turning then to address Batt, Dedrick added, "We appreciate you so much. You are their living legacy."