

THE BEMIS STORY



A publication of Bemis Historical Society

Bemis Mill Village Museum, 2 North Missouri Street, Jackson, TN 38301

Bemis Historical Society, PO Box 9266, Jackson, TN 38314-9266

www.bemishistory.org & <https://www.facebook.com/TheBemisMuseum>

Autumn 2025



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Bemis Historical Ornament 2025

Bemis Historical Society proudly announces the fifth addition to our historical ornament collection. This beautifully crafted ornament pays tribute to the life and legacy of our beloved Dr. William Kelly Smythe. Featuring nostalgic artwork by Mary Patrick Spellings, this keepsake commemorates 125 years of Bemis history — a meaningful tribute to our past and to Dr. Smythe's legacy.

Dr. William Kelly Smythe (1881-1964) served Bemis, Tennessee, for over 50 years, delivering over 2,000 babies and treating countless patients, regardless of their ability to pay. Dr. Smythe practiced in Bemis until his final days and was deeply loved and respected by the community.

Our historical ornaments and artists are:

Bemis Auditorium – Mary Patrick Spellings

Judson Moss Bemis Fountain – Rosalee Jennings Gibbons

Bemis Cotton Mill – Rosalee Jennings Gibbons

Union Church – Melanie Marcom

Dr. William Kelly Smythe – Mary Patrick Spellings

Contact Joel Jackson (731-571-5435) to purchase ornaments for \$20 each at the Bemis Mill Village Museum.



Message from BHS Chairman Joel Jackson

Bemis Mill Town's 125th birthday party was a great success during Bemis Heritage Day 2025. Thank you to all our sponsors, volunteers, and everyone who came out to celebrate. Everyone enjoyed our first Classic Car Cruise-In, organized by Wayne Lee; and Bobby McAlexander's popular Chat 'N Chew display drew plenty of memories.

We are pleased to report that the Society received a Maintenance & Improvement Grant of \$19,080, deposited on January 15, 2025, from the State of Tennessee/Tennessee State Museum.

However, our \$35,000 Tennessee Museum Grant application (intended for exterior painting \$30,000 and an updated sprinkler system \$3,000) was not approved. In addition, the annual \$500 grant from the Greater Jackson Chamber's *Visit Jackson Tennessee* division has been discontinued. That funding helped cover the tent rental for Bemis Heritage Day.

We now face several urgent needs: \$3,000 – sprinkler system update, \$3,000 – repair of two roof leaks (requiring rented rolling lifter), and \$500 – tent rental for Bemis Heritage Day 2026.

Please consider donating and/or renewing your membership to help preserve our museum and history. Membership dues for 2026 remain \$25, payable to *Bemis Historical Society* and mailed to P.O. Box 9266, Jackson, TN 38314-9266. We appreciate your continued support of the Bemis Historical Society.

Mark your calendars for Bemis Heritage Day 2026 as we celebrate America's 250th birthday on Saturday, May 16, 2026. Join us, rain or shine, for a fun-filled day as we reconnect with old friends and welcome new ones.

Cotton Boll Tributes

The Cotton Boll tribute honors individuals and memories with generous donations of \$500 or more.

In Honor of Wyatt, Andy, & Ben Moore
Donated by Joe Wyatt Moore

In Honor of the Class of 1962
South Side High School
Donated by SSHS Class of 1962

<https://bemishistory.org/memorialshonoraria/>

Memorial Contributions

Thank you to the following donors for their contributions made in memory of loved ones.

In Memory of Bruce Carden
Donated by Janis Cupples
Donated by Tony & Elizabeth Holmes
Donated by Joel & Brenda Jackson
Donated by Doris K. McKenzie
Donated by Janet Smith

In Memory of James Robert "Jim" Coatney
Donated by Bette Hunter Coatney

In Memory of Shirley Rogers Held
Donated by the Class of 1956
J. B. Young High School

In Memory of Billy Jones
Donated by Larry & Jenny Beeman

In Memory of Marjorie Tate McClanahan
Donated by the Class of 1962
South Side High School

In Memory of Bobbie Maitland Mims
Donated by the Class of 1962
South Side High School

In Memory of the Pirtle Family
Donated by Sadie L. Rogers

In Memory of Mattie Sue Johnson Roark
Donated by Charles & Ondra Farmer
Donated by Kenny & Susan Fisher
Donated by Charlotte S. Hammond
Donated by Kitty Hawkins
Donated by Teresa Williams Irvin
Donated by Joel & Brenda Jackson
Donated by Jenniebeth King
Donated by Butch & Kathy Haney Williams

<https://bemishistory.org/memorialshonoraria/>

Memorial – Sue Roark

Mattie Sue Johnson Roark, a charter member and former officer of Bemis Historical Society, passed away on October 16, 2025, just 17 days before her 94th birthday. Our condolences to her family. Her lifelong dedication to Bemis will be deeply missed.

<https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/jackson-tn/sue-roark-12559590>

Monetary Donations

The Bemis Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the following supporters for their 2025 contributions.

Anonymous
Drs. Stephen & Catherine Carls
Polly Darnall
Bruce & Dottie Dorris
Doris K. McKenzie
Kenneth Newman
Hugh A. "Tony" Rice
Garney B. Scott, Jr.
Westland Simpson
Class of 1962 ~ South Side High School
Frances "Fran" Babb Turner

Artifact Donations

We are proud to add these artifacts to our growing collection preserving the history of the Bemis Mill Village.

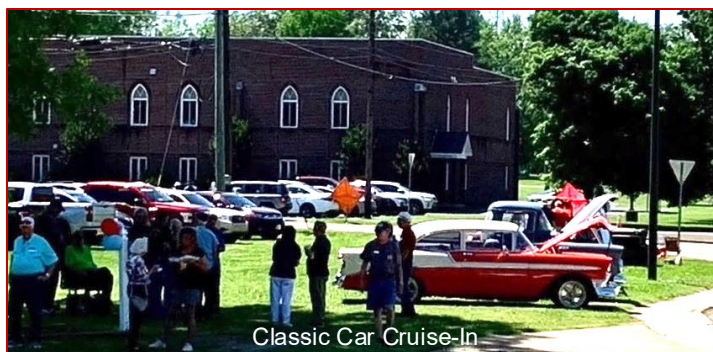
Commemorative plates (two):
Bemis Mill Office & Cotton Mill
Bemis Pentecostal Church
Donated by Mickey Granger

World War I Helmet of PFC James Castele Innis
Donated by Jennifer Underwood,
James' great-granddaughter

Bemis Heritage Day Sponsors

Thank you to our sponsors for a successful Bemis Heritage Day 2025 and Bemis' 125th birthday.

Diddy's BBQ
Jackson Visitors Bureau
Matt Hensley – Food Giant (buns)
Tommy Sagely – Lays (potato chips)
Todd Jordan – Kroger (drinks and water)



Classic Car Cruise-In

Thank You to Dennis Hays

Many thanks to Dennis Hays for faithfully preparing the museum's water system for winter each year—at no charge for the past 18 years! Dennis shuts off the water, drains the pipes, and adds antifreeze to the drain lines to protect the building through the cold months. Thank you.



Shelby Davis, Sandra Holley, Rayann McCaslin, Charlotte Johnson

Classic Car Cruise-In

A special thank-you goes to Wayne Lee for organizing the first Classic Car Cruise-In at Bemis Heritage Day. The event drew several proud car owners and plenty of admirers. Among the participants were George Jones, showcasing his 1942 Ford built for the U. S. Marine Corps; Terry Graves, with his striking red and white 1956 Chevrolet Bel Air; a light gray and blue 1959 GMC 100 pickup truck; an aqua 1957 Ford Thunderbird two-seat convertible; and a red Chevrolet Corvette C6. The cruise-in was a great addition to the day's festivities!

West TN PBS Tennessee is Talking

Joel Jackson was interviewed by Tom Britt on May 30, 2025. <https://video.westtnpbs.org/video/bemis-historical-society-ydrqgs/>

Bemis Heritage Day Saturday, May 16, 2026 *Rain or Shine*

Monthly Meetings in 2026

Join us for our monthly meetings on the third Tuesday at the Bemis Mill Village Museum at 6:00 p.m. ~ February 17, March 17, April 21, June 16, July 21, August 18, September 15, and October 20.

If you're interested in presenting a program, please reach out to Vice Chairman David Mayo.

Our programs are uploaded to YouTube. The URLs are on our website.

<https://bemishistory.org/monthly-meetings/>

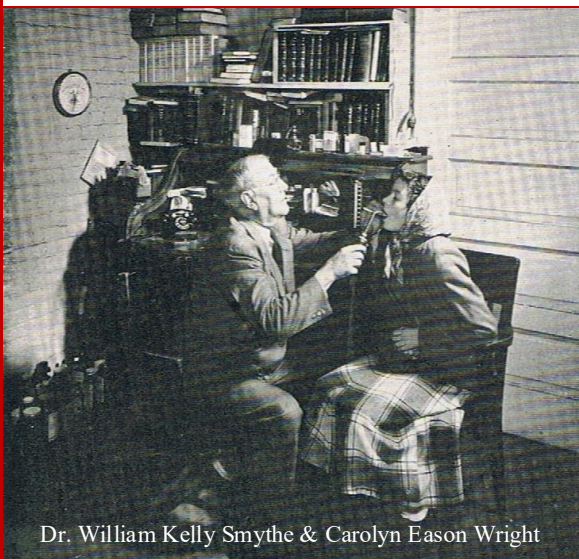
Museum's Company Store

There are a variety of items for sale in the Company Store, including items below. Mail a check, attend a meeting, or contact a member of the Board to visit the museum. Prices do not include shipping costs.

Bemis Historical Ornaments – \$20
Trucker Caps w/Bemis Est. 1900 – \$20
Baseball Cap w/Bemis logo (red, unstructured)* – \$20
Baseball Cap w/Chat 'N Chew sign (black)* – \$20
Bemis Mill Town Coloring Book w/History – \$3
Bemis 1919 Recruitment Booklet (reprint) – \$10
Bemis Tidbits Book by Joel Jackson – \$15
Brick from Bemis Cotton Mill – \$5
DVD Bemis 50th Anniversary (video/123 photos) – \$15
Historic Bemis Since 1900 Car Tag – \$10
Museum Note Cards & Envelopes (10 per pack) – \$10
Recipes of the Bemis Historical Society
(published 2003, reprinted 2020) – \$15

*Limited supply

<https://bemishistory.org/museums-company-store/>



Dr. William Kelly Smythe & Carolyn Eason Wright





Fisher Family Reunion

Some of the descendants of Benton and Acenah Fisher gathered at the Bemis Mill Village Museum, formerly the Bemis Theater, during their annual family reunion in July 2025. In addition to working in the Bemis Cotton Mill's machine shop, Benton also operated the theater's projectors for many years. The couple had 13 children and more than 180 descendants, with over 160 still living today.

Membership Dues

Please help with the maintenance of our beautiful museum by sending annual membership dues of \$25 for individual or family memberships to:

Bemis Historical Society
PO Box 9266
Jackson, TN 38314-9266



Bemis Boy Ready.



JAMES INNIS.

James Innis, oldest son of Mrs. Tade Innis, is ready to cross the "big pond." Mrs. Innis, regardless of her being a widow, says if her two little sons were older she would willingly give them to Uncle Sam. James volunteered into the service of Company K, First Tennessee Infantry, in July.

PFC James Castele Innis, WWI
The Commercial Appeal
Sunday, February 10, 1918

Bemis Historical Markers

New historical markers were erected in 2025.

BICYCLE HILL – Sixth St & Massachusetts St
In memory of Floyd & Mayola Scoggins
Donated by Doris Scoggins

NEW TOWN

In memory of Perry & Irene Rolison
Donated by Linda Rolison Brewer Family

The following historical sites need sponsors.

BEMIS HIGH SCHOOL, CLASSES OF 1938-1940

SCHOOL HOUSE – TN & B Streets (NW corner)

HOME EC HOUSE – 19 TN Street

SKEET RANGE – Cemetery Road

SLUICeway CLEAN-OUT BUNKER – Center of

Second Street lawn (big 5 ft x 5 ft concrete/very visible – provided water via twin pipes to mill pond from falls/dam)

Markers are \$100 each. Contact a board member to sponsor a marker. Thank you for supporting the historic preservation of the Bemis Mill Village.

BHS Board of Directors

If you have questions or comments, please contact the Bemis Historical Society's Board of Directors.

Chairman Joel Jackson

731-571-5435 joeljackson2@eplus.net

Vice Chairman David Mayo

731-225-0634 davidalanmayo@gmail.com

Secretary Robert Gaugh

731-499-2229 rgaugh@gmail.com

Treasurer Anita Roark

731-427-2609 arr285@me.com

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Mailing address changes should be given to:

Webmaster/Newsletter Editor Kathy Haney Williams.

731-225-6938 KatherineWilliams@charter.net

## Bemis Alley Antiques

Historic Bemis has a new addition to its business community. *Bemis Alley Antiques* recently opened in the former West Drugs building at 215 S Missouri Street, bringing new life to a familiar corner of town.