

## History center director's book tells Oldham's tale

BY ANDREA UHDE • AUHDE@COURIER-JOURNAL.COM • FEBRUARY 24, 2010

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The trains that speed through La Grange nowadays are full of cars and equipment, but Nancy Theiss has heard of different times.

During World War II, soldiers would hang out of the trains as they rumbled through town, hoping residents would grab the envelopes from their hands and rush them to the post office.

“There are some cute **stories**,” said Theiss, the director of the Oldham County History Center, whose new history book debuts in bookstores this month.

Its publication precedes by a month a series of exhibits and competitions based on river themes that will be presented at the history center through midsummer.

The book has 88 stories including an array of Theiss' weekly columns published in The Courier-Journal and tidbits from oral histories she collected from senior residents who were honored in the Living Treasures program.

The book, “Oldham County: Stories From the River's **Edge**,” is a “glimpse into the overall history of the counties that developed along the Ohio River,” Theiss said.

It touches on slave trade and the Underground Railroad, along with commerce, recreation and personal stories told by the residents who experienced them.

“My favorite stories are the ones where I've personally taken some oral histories and put them into stories,” said Theiss, who finished the book in November.

The History Press publishing company contacted the Oldham County Historical Society about the possibility of a book on Oldham's history last summer, Theiss said. The book was commissioned — meaning the history center didn't have to pay for it to be published, Theiss said. The center made a little **money** and is allowed to keep 40 percent of the proceeds from the books it sells at the center, she said.

Oldham has one other comprehensive history book called “History and Families of Oldham County, Kentucky.” The Center still sells copies of that book, which was published in 1999 and covers Oldham's growth in the 19th century, Theiss said.

For her book, Theiss chose stories that revolve around the Ohio River, which runs along the north side of Oldham.

Historically, the Ohio was one of the rivers where development began, she said.

“It all fell together in a river theme,” she said.

Breck Morgan, an artist in the Westport area, created the artwork for the book jacket. His artwork, which includes oil paintings and sculptures, will be displayed at the history center starting March 27.

Multimedia artwork based on the river theme and submitted by Oldham residents will be on display at the Rob Morris Chapel on the history center's property starting April 15. The artwork will be part of a multimedia contest with cash prizes for the top three works in each of five age-based categories.

Also, artist Al Gorman of Louisville will be displaying some of his work, which is made from debris collected along the Ohio River, Theiss said. Mike Strohm of Cincinnati also will make a living stream with crawdads, mussels and other freshwater wildlife that can be found in the Ohio River.

The exhibit will run until Aug. 1.

“We're developing this exhibit all around the river theme, which I love,” Theiss said.

“My old theme is that people who learn their local histories become better citizens, and hopefully take care of their environment.”

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