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Searching for 'Town Treasure'

Since June 2009, Powder Springs photographer Stan Kaady has been capturing the faces—and memories—of the city's most longstanding citizens.

By [Michael Stone](#) [Email the author](#) March 7, 2011

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What makes someone a Town Treasure?

Must they have fought in World War II? Perhaps they had to have once been an employee of the now defunct Coats and Clark Threadmill in Austell? Dirt roads, cotton gins and canning food for winter—must someone have experienced those firsthand?

Yes, the Powder Springs citizens Stan Kaady photographs for his Town Treasures project can recount what it is was like to live through those times. But it's the implied quality attached to each of them—the true understanding of the community's evolution that comes only with longevity—that makes someone a true Town Treasure.

"The idea behind the project was to create a historical document of people who grew up in Powder Springs and their impressions of the city during their time here," Kaady described. "It's designed for people who move in here later on—40 or 50 years from now. When they ask themselves, 'Who lived here before? What were the people like?'—these photos are designed to answer that."

Kaady began the Town Treasures project in June 2009, first photographing World War II veteran J.W. Garrard.

From [Kaady's blog](#): "(Garrard) spoke of a time when doors were left unlocked, neighbors would drop by just to say hello, and the placing of an egg in the mailbox for the postman because that is what you did when you could not afford the stamp for a letter."

In total, he's photographed 14 of the city's most longstanding citizens and talked with them about their memories. As a showing of gratitude, Kaady prints pictures from the shoot for them.

"They've offered to pay me to do these pictures, and I go, 'That isn't what this is about,'" he said. "The project isn't about money."

He admits that he would like to have done more with the project up to this point. But the 53-year-old self-employed photographer sometimes must put the money-making work first.

"I've been so busy with my commercial work that you just ignore the personal projects that you need for your personal growth," he said, adding that many of his paid gigs come from corporate clients wanting professional photographs of their employees.

But, with a list of about 30 people next in line to be photographed for Town Treasures, he hopes to use the upcoming summer to revive work on the project.

"I'm starting with the older folks first for obvious reasons, then I'm going to work my way back to the younger people," he said.

His ultimate goal: to have the completed project on display at the [Seven Springs Museum](#), though he knows finishing is somewhat impossible because there will always be more work to be done, more people to photograph, more history to learn.

"He's really interested in the history of Powder Springs," said 79-year-old Imogene Abernathy, one of those whom Kaady has photographed. "We're just so proud that he's doing this."

The Newcomer

Kaady's interest in photography started when he was in sixth grade, before the coming of digital cameras. It was then a teacher showed him the magic of darkroom printing.

"When he put the paper into the chemicals and the image came up, I thought that was just amazing," he recalled.

He would go on to attend Portland State University, where he met the accountant for his photography business—and his wife of 27 years—Linda. She couldn't help but be attracted to the skilled artist and photographer.

"He listens with his eyes," she said. "That's how I would describe it."

The couple moved to New York, where Mr. Kaady began to work toward a bachelor's degree in commercial photography at Rochester University. After graduating in 1988, he was offered a corporate photography job with a company in Atlanta.

So the Kaadys saddled up and headed toward Georgia's capitol to set up camp in their new apartment.

As interest rates fell in the early '90s, they began searching for more permanent residency in outlying communities, and in 1993, they stumbled upon Powder Springs.

"We found it by chance," Stan Kaady remembered. "After a fall afternoon of house hunting in Paulding County, we headed home to Atlanta and happened to pass through Powder Springs. We liked what we saw in the downtown area and the small-town feel."

The Kaadys worked hard and eventually reached their goal of owning their own business.

Being a relative newcomer to Powder Springs, Stan Kaady does not confess to being an expert on its history. But that novicehood seems to have invigorated his interest in the city's roots, which date back to its founding in 1838 and beyond.

He gradually got more involved in the city, where he is now on the [Planning and Zoning Commission](#) and a member of the Seven Springs Historical Society, which oversees the Seven Springs Museum.

"He's just a community guy," his wife said.

Stan Kaady's first personal project in Powder Springs was Old School, a documentation of the old Powder Springs Elementary School building before it was knocked down about five years ago to make way for the [Coach Ford Center](#). The school was open from the 1920s to the mid-'80s.

"I just liked the building—simple as that," he said.

He got the idea for his next local project—Town Treasures—from [The Oxford Project](#). A photographer in Oxford, Iowa wanted to take pictures of everyone in town, so he made an unused storefront into a studio and invited people to stop by.

What sets Stan Kaady's project apart from the one in Oxford, he said, is that he photographs people in their environments, whether that's at their longtime homes, on a baseball field or in a church.

"I want an environment that tells something about them as best I can," he said.

The Treasure Chest Speaks

As Kaady went around town, photographing those who are eyewitnesses to the city's evolution over the past several decades, he learned their stories.

There's Estie Norris, who, at 95, still lives and gets around on her own.

"It's been a good life," said Norris, who [remains an avid quilter](#). "I've just thoroughly enjoyed my life."

Norris has lived mostly in the Austell area during her life. But she called Powder Springs home from 1923 until she got married in 1934 and has been a member of the city's [Senior Center](#) for many years.

Living for nearly a century allows for plenty of stories: working for \$1 per 12-hour shift at the Coats and Clark Threadmill, where she was a career employee; picking and selling blackberries and cotton; all the roads around being nothing more than beaten dirt paths; having three daughters, six grandchildren, six great-grandchildren and two great-great-grandchildren; and traveling by foot to school in freezing temperatures.

"We walked to school every morning," she said. "Our feet would be frozen when we got to school, but we always made it."

When asked if she thought Kaady's pictures looked good, she jokingly replied: "It's like I said, 'They look like me.'"

One of Kaady's personal favorite subjects was Abernathy. Her family moved to Powder Springs in the early '40s to live with her grandmother because her grandfather had just passed away.

"It was just a very small town," Abernathy recalled. She mentioned the city's dirt roads and absence of electricity.

Though retired from her last job in a payroll department in Marietta, she said she has been keeping busy: She is a member of the Seven Springs Historical Society, volunteers at [Tapp Middle School](#) and helps quilt items for charity with Norris at the Senior Center.

She said she's grateful that Kaady is doing the project so her generation's local history and its impact will be passed down.

"The younger folks in town will have that because there's not that many of us left who have lived here a long time," she said.

Perhaps Kaady's favorite story to tell is one from World War II vet Pete Hardy.

Hardy's parents had a general timeframe of when their son was coming home from war, Kaady said, but not an exact time. A bus dropped him off at a nearby gas station, and he proceeded to walk to his home on Old Austell Road.

Making the most of their land, his parents surrounded the house with corn plants.

"He walked through the cornfield and came out the other side and his parents were out in the yard working," Kaady said. "So when they turned around, they saw him coming out of the cornfield with his duffle bag. I just thought that was an amazing story."

Hardy said he clearly remembers that day, as it was one that signified an end to the horrifying events he had just witnessed overseas.

"It was pretty rough, but I don't talk about that a whole lot," said the 85-year-old, who was in the Battle of the Bulge. "Lot of death. To tell you the truth, I was scared to death, but I didn't run."

Hardy described what it was like to see exploding artillery shells and not knowing if the next one would land on him.

"It was a terrible experience, I tell ya," he said. "People that haven't been in war, you don't know what it's like."

Hardy, whose family moved to Powder Springs in the mid-1940s, admitted that he didn't know much about the Town Treasures project. But, he added, Kaady was nonetheless enthusiastic when photographing.

"He came 'round everywhere in the yard," Hardy recalled. "He even laid down in the ditch and made a picture of me up on the bank."

Deep Roots

Whether it's the veterans, the grocery store employees or the sharecroppers, there seems to be at least one homogenous quality to all of the Town Treasures.

"Most of them didn't like being away from home very much," Kaady said. "They always seemed to have that sense of wanting to come back to the town they grew up in."

Kaady described today's society as one in which many people move about freely, seldom settling down.

"I find that amazing," he said. "We're such a transient society that people don't stay put. But these people in (the Town Treasures') generation ... our lifestyle is totally nuts to them."

Though he goes in with a conversational mentality, Kaady does have a list of questions he likes to present to the Town Treasures.

"One of the questions I ask is: 'Have you ever thought about leaving?' If they had thought about it, they didn't think about it much."

To see Stan Kaady's Town Treasures and Old School projects, [click here](#), then look for the "Projects" tab. A video of Kaady talking about Town Treasures is attached to this article, as are sample photographs from the project.

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