

Past taking over at courthouse

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SHELBY — The courtroom benches inside the old courthouse were filled Saturday with the remnants of Cleveland County's past.

Where visitors once sat are now layers and layers of clothing. Where lawyers once sat are dozens of ceramics and pieces of glass.

Each with their own origin and story.

"Sometimes you wish the objects could talk," said Lenore Hardin, one of two independent contractors who have spent the past six months cataloguing each item at the courthouse, which now serves as the county's historical museum.

The effort began in May when Hardin and Laura Overbey started going through each of the several thousand items housed at the museum to combine existing information on the pieces with a physical description and photograph to go into a computer database.

How old it is? Where it came from? Who donated it? Its condition? Its story.

How big a project is it?

"Huge," smiled Hardin. "I couldn't even tell you how many objects there are."

Military uniforms arranged by branches of service and time period. Wedding dresses from the 1880s. The boots of a woman killed during the First National Bank implosion decades ago. And even the suit Shelby

native O. Max Gardner wore for his gubernatorial inauguration during the Great Depression.

The project is expected to continue into late 2008.

"We're going to try to get everything in by Sept. 08," Overbey said Saturday as she and volunteers were hard at work in the Hall of Fame room. "That's our goal."

At that time, according to Brownie Plaster of Destination Cleveland County, all the objects will be moved off-site temporarily as the museum undergoes a much-needed renovation.

JoAnn Surratt, who spent 34 years as a Spanish teacher at Burns High School, volunteers her time – including her weekends – helping with the project and piecing together the county's history.

"It needed doing," Surratt said of the work. "I found my purpose in life."

"It's fun," Hardin said of the work. "Each object tells its own story. ... If you live here or grew up here, it's just a great cultural resource."