

TEMPERANCE HALL, A VIEW FROM LONG BRANCH

by

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Temperance Hall Remembers Book II

“A Brief History of Temperance Hall, Tennessee”

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Without doubt, the first relationship between the residents of Long Branch and Temperance Hall was that of commerce. The earliest and most dominant attraction was Caplinger’s grist mill. (established approximately 1820).

It has been said that the ax was the most important tool used in conquering the wilderness. I think we can add that the grist mill was the most important industry in establishing and sustaining communities. This certainly was the case with the Temperance Hall mill. Surrounding communities, including Long Branch, that did not have a stream sufficient for powering their own mill, appear to have not begun forming until the Temperance Hall mill was in operation.

Once the mill was attracting settlers from a large area, enterprising merchants responded to the opportunity of supplying these people with other needs. As a result, several general stores, a bank, a hotel, a casket dealer, a High School (Academy) and blacksmith shops came into being.

It is probably hard for later generations that have grown up in a “throw-away-society” to grasp the importance of the blacksmith shop to the early farmers. These farmers, hard pressed to make ends meet, believed that most anything broken could be fixed. They expected the blacksmith to perform near miracles repairing their equipment. If a “smith” had a special skill, his reputation became widely known.

The two blacksmiths I most often remember were the Midgett brothers, Bart and John and Bince (their father). Their shops were separate and it would appear that they were competitors. Actually, they both had their own special skills. Bince was known for his ability to repair wagon wheels, whereas, John was known for making “one-of-a-kind” items. Quite often a farmer would have a need for an unusual device. He may have never seen a similar item, nor did he have a picture or drawing. He simply described the function expected of the item and John would proceed to make it. All the blacksmiths were skilled at shoeing horses, making plow points, “tempering” cutting tools and many other jobs required to keep the farm equipment in working order.

The casket dealer provided a necessary but unpopular service. As I recall, the caskets came in three different sizes: small, medium and large. They were priced according to size. One or more of each size was kept in a storeroom in the hotel building. One of my first memories of a visit to Temperance Hall (I was about 4 years old) was someone taking me to the casket room and trying to get me to lay in one of the caskets.

For several years, the Earl Academy provided the area with the only educational institution beyond grammar school. Several young people from Long Branch attended the academy. A partial list: Lat Braswell, Raymond Anderson, **Minnie Denny, Doyle Denny**, Buster Starnes and Arthur Maynard.

The “polling place” for Long Branch has always been at Temperance Hall. This created another reason for interchange between the communities. Before the wide spread use of the automobile, entire families would come by wagon, buggy and on horseback, many brought a picnic type lunch and stayed the entire day visiting, shopping and discussing politics.

Speaking of the automobile, the first car to travel the Long Branch road was from Temperance Hall. This was a Model T-Ford, driven by Frank Williams in 1921. This created much excitement, was discussed for years.

For many years most of the professional medical services for Long Branch was provided by doctors from Temperance Hall. Those best remembered were: Dr. Bill Robinson, Dr. George Martin, Dr. Robert Mason and Dr. S. C. Robinson. They came to the patient’s home by buggy or riding a horse, bringing a black leather satchel containing a variety of medicine. When needed, they came anytime -day or night - in all types of weather. The charge for a visit, including the medicine, was two or three dollars.

Not all contact between the communities was of the business nature. Many lasting friendships developed and there was close ties between the churches. This was especially evident during “big meeting” time, when there would be much visitation by the members and pastors. One pastor from Temperance Hall I well remember was Rev. Luther McBride.

Like so many small towns across America, the wide spread use of the automobile and changes in farming techniques has removed Temperance Hall from its once prominent place as an area trade center. However, the town is not dying. A very active community center helps maintain interest and pride and three active churches bring the people together frequently. Many people are attracted to the quite easy-going life style as a place for retirement. Others, with jobs several miles away elect to make Temperance Hall their home.

We predict when the two-hundredth anniversary of the start up of Caplingers mill comes around, Temperance Hall will still be a nice place to live.

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