

Progressive Reform: Prohibition
Political Development, 1890-1920
Putnam County, Tennessee 1850-1970
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Once the nation concluded its imperialistic venture, many Americans turned with new enthusiasm to improving political, economic, and social institutions. The reformers, usually of the middle class, included businessmen, journalists, clergymen, psychologists, and sociologists. The effected changes first at the local level in municipalities and counties; then at the state level; and eventually, particularly under the administration of Woodrow Wilson, in the national government.

The Progressive movement in Tennessee centered about efforts to prohibit the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages, a struggle so intense that it had severe political consequences.

Before the turn of the century the Prohibition party, organized nationally in 1869 and in Tennessee in 1883, led a drive to add an amendment to the Tennessee Constitution which would ban the sale of liquors. In 1885 the General Assembly proposed such an amendment. The Tennessee Constitution required that the ensuing legislature must re-propose the amendment before election officials could submit it to the voters of the state for ratification. In the 1886 election Putnam Countians chose Dr. J.B. Martin, who favored prohibition, as their delegate to the Tennessee House, and in 1887 the General Assembly again proposed the prohibition amendment and set 30 September 1887 for a referendum.

During that summer and early fall advocates and opponents of the proposition debated it hotly. H.C. Snodgrass, a Sparta lawyer, who, it was rumored, took a "snort" of whiskey before each verbal attack upon prohibition, claimed that the idea originated in New England, the home of many dangerous "isms." Proponents of prohibition, he warned, hoped to split the Democratic party. George Dibrell, also, of White County, E.E. Gardenhire of Trousdale, and Columbus Marchbanks of Putnam traveled about the area urging voters to support the amendment. On 14 September 1887 a large crowd heard a vehement debate on the issue in Cookeville, and the town's correspondent to the Smith County Record reported that two-thirds of those present favored prohibition. He was badly mistaken. Putnam Countians voted 515 for and 1,344 against the amendment, which also failed in the Upper Cumberland and in the state.

In the meantime the General Assembly by a unique law and a series of amendments enacted what amounted to local option on the liquor question. The rural people most opposed the sale of alcohol, and in response to their demands the legislature in 1877 passed the Hamilton or Four Mile law making the sale of

liquor within four miles of a private school in a rural area illegal. Since many schools in the state were private and all communities except those which were incorporated were considered "rural," the law applied to wide areas. If a private school were located near the center of an incorporated town and the citizens wished to rid the community of saloons, they could secure passage of an act in the state legislature revoking the town's charter and thereby making sale of liquor there illegal.

This is what Cookeville did. Washington Academy, a private school, stood approximately at the present site of the city's municipal building. In 1879 the General Assembly repealed Cookeville's incorporation and thereby abolished its saloons.

Double Springs used the Four Mile Law for the opposite effect. Because a large and profitable distillery was located there, its citizens wanted to sell liquor. In 1887 the General Assembly amended the Hamilton Law so that it would apply to rural areas adjacent to any school, public or private. Double Springs, with a population of only thirty-eight, incorporated in 1899. The state then no longer classified it as "rural" and it could sell whiskey. In 1899 the General assembly extended the Four Mile law to towns of two thousand or less, provided they incorporated after the passage of the amendment, in 1903 to towns of less than five thousand, and in 1907 to cities. Then municipalities which fell under the requisite maximum populations could surrender their charters and reincorporate in order to become dry.

Monterey used this strategy. It had incorporated in 1893 but did not fall under the provisions of the Four Mile Law, and a saloon was soon in operation within its town limits. Citizens forced this dram house out of business, and Mayor Robert Lee Ray and Aldermen John W. Welch, J. Edd Jones, J.C. Walker, and John f. Sehorn refused to license a second saloon; but selling of whiskey continued in the town. In 1901 the two thousand, and the legislature, at Monterey's request, revoked its 1893 charter and in the same bill granted it a new one.

Since after 1899 small communities which had never incorporated could do so and thereby prohibit the sale of alcoholic beverages, Algood incorporated in 1901. The town however, secured a repeal of its charter in 1903 and did not reincorporate until 1911.

Many Cookevillians, recognizing the need for improvement of their streets and schools, had urged incorporation before the 1899 extension of the Hamilton Law. In 1896 they had requested local lawyers to determine whether a charter could include a clause prohibiting the dispensing of liquor. When the answer of the barristers was negative, civic leaders called for a referendum on the issue. The vote was 110 against, 62 for incorporation. "It shows," declared the Press, "that the people of Cookeville draw the line at saloons, and prefer to bear the ills we

have than to be bossed and debauched by the genius of evil, and the agent of woe and despair.”

By 1903 the Hamilton Law protected a new town from saloons, and Cookeville's citizens voted 104 to 2 for incorporation. On 15 April 1903 Putnam's Representative James N. King secured passage of a bill in the General Assembly rechartering Cookeville.

By these tactics most of Putnam's communities abolished saloons. Double Springs was the county's last wet town. Against the wishes of its citizens Representative King secured revocation of the village's charter in 1903. The Lone Star Saloon, however, continued to operate illegally; and Cookevillians resolved to do something about it. Elmer L. Wirt, editor of the newly established Putnam County Herald, spearheaded the drive. He called a mass meeting at the courthouse. There the reformers elected **Oscar King Holladay** chairman and Wirt secretary and authorized a committee to petition the County Court to elect a county attorney. The magistrates chose **Holladay** for a one year term. His chief duty was to prosecute illegal selling of whiskey. The doors of the Lone Star soon swung closed for the last time.

Apparently little effort was made, though, to rid the county of moonshiners who made their own brew for home consumption and sale. Back in the hollows and hills whiskey was often an accepted beverage at dinner tables as well as at other social occasions. "Shiners" readily sold their brew to any customers who could pay for it. Rural mail carriers sometimes unwittingly delivered it. Dillard Peek, for example, once found an unaddressed package the size of a shoe box in a rural mailbox. When he called up to the house to inquire about the package, the sender shouted, "Haven't you got any sense? That is a pair of shoes I'm sending your daddy." Peek later learned that the package contained a half gallon of whiskey.

In the twentieth century organized religion took up the prohibition cause in Tennessee. Throughout the state Methodists, Baptists, Cumberland and USA Presbyterians, and the Disciples of Christ taught that any drinking of alcoholic beverages was sinful and sale of liquors should be illegal. (Southern Presbyterians, and the Disciples of Christ leaders urged total abstinence but generally refrained from political activity.) The Southern Methodist, Baptists, and Presbyterians, USA, worked zealously to rid Putnam County of Whiskey. They organized rallies featuring prohibition speakers, and their ministers, Sunday after Sunday, condemned strong drink from the pulpit.

In addition, in 1907, Cookeville women organized a chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), and elected Mrs. D. W. Sloan president. They organized some sixty children into a Loyal Temperance Union. Mrs. H.P. Smith headed the Baxter unit of the WCTU.

In spite of these efforts, not only was liquor distilled in Putnam, but dealers brought it in on trains, wagons, and stages. In 1907 Putnam's Representative Quimby Dyer introduced a bill in the General Assembly to prohibit shipments of whiskey into Tennessee's dry towns. When the measure failed, Cookeville and Monterey enacted ordinances making the transport of alcoholic beverages into their towns on common carriers illegal. Even though Algood reincorporated in 1911 after statewide prohibition had been enacted, at its first meeting the Board of Aldermen passed a measure prohibiting the sale or receipt of intoxicating drinks.

In 1908 a series of events resulted in state prohibition. In that year in one of the most memorable gubernatorial contests in Tennessee's history, lawyer and newspaper editor Edward Ward Carmack challenged incumbent Malcolm Patterson in the Democratic primary. Stage prohibition was the principal issue. Carmack advocated prohibition by legislation; Patterson supported local option. The Putnam County herald backed Patterson vigorously, the Cookeville Press grudgingly; and Patterson won the Democratic primary in Putnam County 1,228 to 756. He also won the state contest, and because victory in the Democratic primary was usually tantamount to election in those years, Patterson easily took the governorship in the November general election.

Bitter over his defeat, Carmack attacked Patterson and those who opposed prohibition from the editorial pages of the newly-established Nashville Tennessean. He made Duncan Cooper, a business and political associate of Patterson, a special target, and when the angry Cooper and his son met the editor on a Nashville street corner, young Cooper shot and killed him. After litigation in lower courts, the Tennessee Supreme Court upheld a decision of guilty and a long prison sentence for the elder Cooper. Patterson, however, immediately pardoned his friend. The murder and pardon created an uproar throughout the state. Prohibitionists made Carmack a martyr to their cause and renewed their efforts to end the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages.

Many Putnam Countians, although they had not supported the editor earlier, grieved over Carmack's death and changed their minds about prohibition. On 15 November 1908 mourners held memorial services for him at the Cookeville Presbyterian Church, USA. In December the Cookeville WATU, supported by local churches, organized a mass meeting to call for state prohibition. Zealous "drys" packed the Methodist Church to capacity. All other congregations had cancelled services so that their members could attend. A WCTU choir sang, and civic leaders warned the audience of the dangers of alcohol. By a unanimous standing vote at the close of the rally, the union congregation declared itself for prohibition.

Oscar King Holladay, born at Pekin in western Putnam County and educated at Cumberland University, was partially instrumental in bringing prohibition to Tennessee. A lawyer with a forceful personality, he dominated the county

Democratic party and gained the title “the Iron Duke of Putnam County” in the Nashville press. The Upper Cumberland elected him state senator in 1908, and on 6 January 1909 he introduced a bill in the Senate which prohibited the sale of alcoholic beverages within four miles of a school anywhere in the state. Only Memphis, Nashville, Chattanooga, and LaFollette, under local option, still had legal liquor. The effect of the bill would be to make Tennessee legally dry. Two days later fifty-seven representatives introduced an identical bill in the lower house.

Crowds packed the capitol galleries to hear the debate over the measure. Determined women, many carrying babies and lunch baskets, came to hear the arguments. The chief opposition to the **Holladay** bill came from the governor and from urban areas. Within a week the measure passed the Senate by a vote of twenty to thirteen and the House, sixty-two to thirty-six. A subsequent bill prohibited manufacturing alcoholic beverages for sale.

In the meantime Carmack Democrats in the state had organized the “Independent Democrats,” supporters of prohibition who aligned themselves against the regular Democrats. This schism in the party which had long dominated Tennessee politics made the 1910 election particularly interesting.

Putnam County’s Democratic Committee split in July of 1910. **Holladay**, Alfred Algood, Jere Whitson, James N. Cox, and Quimby Dyer led the Independents. Elmer L. Wirt, James A. Carlen, Harvey D. Whitson, and James N. King remained loyal Democrats. They nominated Whitson for county judge and Algood Moore for register. The Independents endorsed the Republican candidates Sam Edwards and Norman mass, respectively, for these offices; and, with the help of the Independents, the Republicans won the local offices in the August general election.

In addition, David L. Lansden of Cookeville, running as an Independent, was elected to the Tennessee Supreme Court that summer. Lansden, a native of White County, had served as school superintendent there before moving to Cookeville and opening a law office with L.D. Smith (who later became attorney general of Tennessee). Voters had elected Lansden chancellor of the Fourth Division in 1903. A member of Tennessee’s highest court from 1911 until 1923, he presided as chief justice from 1918 until his retirement from the Court. One of his most notable opinions was the 1912 decision in Prescott v. Duncan, which held that quarterly county courts were established constitutionally and could not be abolished by legislative act. When he died in 1924, he was buried in the Cookeville Cemetery.

In the 1910 November general election the Independents and Republicans again united and once more scored successes in Putnam County.

The Republican gubernatorial candidate, Ben Hooper, received 1,661 votes and the Democratic nominee and long-time Putnam favorite, Robert L. Taylor, in a county which usually went Democratic by an overwhelming majority, only 1,557. Independent **Holladay**, again a candidate for the state senate, defeated Democrat Milton Sidwell 1,748 to 1,437 in the county; and in a squeaker Republican A.R. Massa won Putnam's seat in the Tennessee House. Though they won by small margins, their victories were significant. They showed how rapidly the idea of prohibition had grown in the county since the 1887 referendum. From its birth Putnam had been a stronghold of the Democratic party, but prohibition had split the Democrats deeply, and local and state offices were up for grabs.

Cordell Hull was the one Democratic candidate who survived the 1910 schism in the county. First elected to the United States house of Representatives from Tennessee's Fourth Congressional District in 1906, he won over his opponent, Independent J.R. Odum, in a landslide.

Hull was to become the Upper Cumberland's most outstanding national political figure. Born near Byrdstown in present Pickett County, he took his law degree at Cumberland University in 1891 and began legal practice in Celina. After serving in the Tennessee House of Representatives and the Spanish-American War, he moved to Gainesboro. He became judge of the Fifth Judicial Circuit in 1903. His job was arduous and exhausting. Travelling by horse and buggy over roads that were almost impassable in the winter, he held court for one to two weeks every four months in ten Upper Cumberland counties, including Putnam. Living in a series of small hotels, he arose early to tackle dockets which were sometimes two years behind. After supper he studied cases and prepared opinions late into the night. Throughout the area he became a familiar figure, respected for his hard work, fairness, and courtly manners. Fourth District voters repeatedly returned him to Washington until 1920. In the House, Hull was a Progressive who wrote the Income Tax Law of 1913 and the Inheritance Tax Law of 1916.

In the meantime Putnam Counties returned to the Democratic party. In 1912 the Independents nominated W.T. Bockman of Double Springs to run for state representative against Democrat C.J. Davis and Jere Whitson of Cookeville to oppose Democrat George N. Welch of Monterey for state senator. Davis defeated Bockman 1,755 to 1,407, and Welch won over Whitson 1,741 to 1,484. Welch also carried the senatorial district. In addition Democrat Benton McMillin defeated the Republican incumbent Hooper in the gubernatorial race in Putnam and in Tennessee at large, and Woodrow Wilson easily carried the county and the state in the contest for President of the United States.

By 1914 Tennesseans had put the prohibition controversy in the closet. While virtually all political candidates still paid lip service to legal prohibition, and the Anti-Saloon League quizzed candidates for state office and announced them fit or unfit, the Cookeville WCTU had turned its attention to different matters. Its

members planted flowers on the courthouse lawn, opened a lounge for rural shoppers, and improved school outhouses. In 1918 the Herald reported that although there was still bootlegging in the area, drunks were becoming a curiosity. Then in 1919 the requisite numbers of states ratified the Eighteenth Amendment, prohibiting the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages throughout the United States, and under the provisions of the Volstead Act the national government became the official, though ineffective, watchdog of production, transportation, and sale of liquor.

Three men followed three paths involving alcoholic drink in Putnam County, Tennessee.

Oscar King Holladay, s/o William Alexander & Martha Jane (Jared) Holladay. Oscar was recognized as an able lawyer and a leading member of the Cookeville Bar. He served two terms in the State Senate and was a author of the Holladay Bill book, which was the beginning of prohibition in Tennessee. He is one of the leading Democrats of the state. A Scottish Rite Mason, and a steward in the M.E. Church, South.

Oscar King Holladay married Marguerite "Maggie" Denny, d/o Thompson Luther & Frances "Fannie" Jane (Ford) Denny. Thompson Luther Denny was the s/o Jonothan & Agnes (Thompson) Denny. Jonothan Denny was the s/o Zachariah & Catherine (Stallings) Denny. Zachariah was the great great grandfather of Audrey June (Lambert) Denny. Thompson Luther Denny was a teacher, a lawyer and finally a judge for Putnam County, Tennessee. Zachariah was the great great grandfather of Audrey June (Lambert) Denny.

Luke Alexander Denny, s/o Hugh Toi & Martha Anne (Huddleston) Denny. Luke was a known moonshine runner from the mid-1930's to the mid-1960's.

Luke's father, Hugh Toi Denny, was the s/o John Smith & Nancy Henrietta (Carlen) Denny. John Smith Denny was the s/o Zachariah & Catherine (Stallings) Denny. Zachariah was the great great grandfather of Audrey June (Lambert) Denny.

Milton Otis Loftis, s/o Ray Kirk & Clara Jeanette (Birdwell) Loftis. Milton Otis was appointed Deputy Sheriff under Sheriff Alex M. Burton for Putnam County, Tennessee.

Reported in the local paper was the article: Indictment charging first degree murder was brought by the Grand Jury Tuesday against Homer Roberts, 48. Sixteenth District farmer, in the fatal shooting of Otis Loftis, 30, Deputy Sheriff, who died in the City Hospital Sunday afternoon.

Milton Otis Loftis was shot by Roberts at Roberts' home on the night of September 18, as he and another Deputy, Charlie Norton, were seeking Oakley Herren, 39 on a capias for bond forfeiture and a charge of housebreaking and larceny. Roberts declared under questioning at the jail that he thought Loftis an intruder, and that he fired to protect his home.

Tradition tells it that Roberts had a operating moonshine still on his property and thought that the law had come to arrest him. The area was known as "Bloody Valley" because of many illegal stills known to be operating in that area.

Milton's father Ray Kirk was the s/o Reuben Hickman & Harriet Montgomery (Johnson) Loftis. Reuben Hickman was the s/o James Madison & Sarah Elvria (Dowell) Loftis. James was the s/o Laban & Elizabeth (Holcombe) Loftis. Laban was the s/o Job & Elvira (Goodlett) Loftis. Job Loftis was the s/o William Loftis Sr. of NC. Milton Otis Loftis married Essie Avo (Jernigan) Loftis. Their daughter Geraldine married Tim Denny. They are the parents of Audrey June (Denny) Lambert. Milton is Audrey's Grandfather.

Geraldine (Loftis) Denny was four years old and her sister Audrey Burton, named after the Milton's boss Sheriff Alex M. Burton, was but five months old when Milton Otis died. Essie Avo (Jernigan) Loftis had to raise four children on her own.

Milton Otis is honored at the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial, Washington D.C. – Line 20, Panel 21 – East.

Oscar King Holladay is a descendant of Capt. William Jared & Joseph Jackson Jared – sons of John Jared the wagonmaker.

Luke Alexander Denny is a descendant of Joseph Jackson Jared – son of John Jared the wagonmaker.

Milton Otis Loftis is a descendant of Capt. William Jared – son of John Jared the wagonmaker.

Audrey June (Denny) Lambert is a descendant of Capt. William Jared & Joseph Jackson Jared – sons of John Jared the wagonmaker.