

PROGRESS DOOMED BUFFALO VALLEY

By Connie Wallace

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The children laughed when the old man said, "this town is thriving, very prosperous now, but the time will come when trees will grow up through our buildings.

The old man was a local prophet, **George Medley**. The town was the village of Buffalo Valley in 1925. Today, the prophecy has been fulfilled. Buffalo Valley, a very prosperous community in the early 20th century, is now a relic of the past.

Buffalo Valley gets its name because buffaloes formerly grazed on the fertile bluegrass hillsides.

Buffalo Valley is situated on the Caney Fork River, a tributary of the Cumberland, in the extreme western end of Putnam County.

Since Buffalo Valley is located where three counties – Putnam, Smith and DeKalb – join together, it was a large river port in the late 19th century and a large railroad center in the early 20th.

The Buffalo Valley community makes up the 9th District of Putnam County and covers a large area of land.

Even though the census shows a slight population increase from 265 people in 1900 to 401 people in 1930, not many people moved into or out of Buffalo Valley during that period. In fact, in 1925, there was no real estate for sale.

It had been that way for several years. The number of people that came to Buffalo Valley from other communities, such as St. Mary's Hollow and Club Springs, varied.

Buffalo Valley was nicknamed "Little Egypt" because people could buy practically anything they wanted there.

Three general stores, **Z. A. Medley** and Co., **Robert Alcorn's** Store and **Samuel Young's** Store, were located there. These stores sold anything from the basic needs to dry goods, photographs, and furniture.

The **McKinley-Denny** Oldsmobile dealership was located in Buffalo Valley. A large number of people bought cars in the 1920's, whether they could drive or not. Prices ranged from \$300 to \$500.

The Bank of Buffalo Valley was established in 1912 by **Samuel Denton** and **Jim Evans**. Other types of industry and commerce included:

Three grist mills, two blacksmith shops, a lumber yard, a produce house, a drug store, a tobacco house, and several livestock dealers.

A large amount of livestock was brought to Buffalo Valley to be sold. Mule Days and Chicken Days were very important.

On advertised days, farmers would bring their mules or chickens from miles around to sell. Buyers would come from as close as Lebanon and as far away as New York City. After the sales, the livestock would be shipped by rail to other markets.

Besides shipping, the railroad played an important role in passenger transportation. In 1925, four passenger trains made daily stops at the Buffalo Valley depot. People from surrounding communities would walk or ride horses long distances to catch the train at Buffalo Valley in order to travel to Cookeville or other towns.

Even though there were automobiles, there were not many good roads. Also, the train was much faster.

Because of the fertile farm land, a large amount of corn was grown in the Valley. In fact, so much corn was grown there that the area was known as the county's "breadbasket."

Wheat was another important crop to the farmers. They tried to grow enough to keep themselves in flour.

A threshing machine would come into the community and move from farm to farm. The farmers and their families would gather where the machine was located. The men would help with the wheat while the women cooked for everyone.

The village of Buffalo Valley had a good grammar school. At one time children as well as some rural children attended the school, which had older, more experienced teachers than those in surrounding hamlets.

The rural children had to walk several miles to school. Many would quit before they completed the sixth grade. The older boys were needed to help on the farm, and girls sometimes quit to get married. Others just did not like attending school and would find reasons for not going. Still, there were others who enjoyed school and did not mind walking the three or four miles in order to learn more.

The residents of Buffalo Valley had, for that time, excellent medical care. **Dr. Samuel Denton** practiced medicine in the community for 45 years. He was respected and valued by the community. The doctor would ride horseback to the houses. Sometimes in the winter, his feet would freeze to the stirrups.

To show their appreciation, some of the villagers joined together and bought Dr. Denton a T-model Ford during the 1920's.

The rural residents "doctored" themselves unless the ailment was serious, and then they would contact the doctor. Mid-wives delivered the babies.

Some of the home remedies included iodine for anything from severed fingers to tonsillitis, and "dead shot worm oil" to get rid of tape worms.

Religious organizations established churches in Buffalo Valley in the early 20th century.

The first Southern Methodist Church in Putnam County was established at Rock Springs near Buffalo Valley in 1912. The Presbyterian USA Church at Buffalo Valley was started prior to 1900.

An anti-religious group held weekly meetings at Buffalo Valley during this time. They were honest citizens who helped their fellowmen in the community, it is said. When Halley's Comet passed over in 1910, the group thought the world was ending.

One member asked if anyone could pray, sing or worship. The answer to all of these questions was no. Another member said, "I know darn well I can pass the hat," and so he did.

Prosperity began to decline in the late 1920's. The railroad which had helped make the community prosperous, helped to cause its decline. The trains made daily trips to Cookeville and Nashville. Shoppers could catch the early train to either town and return later that day.

Buffalo Valley merchants ran ads in the weekly newspapers urging people to "buy at Home." This did not stop them from shopping elsewhere.

*Read more about Buffalo Valley, Putnam Co., TN at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>