A BRIEF HISTORY OF COOKEVILLE, TN

By Op Walker
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Part One of Two

In the April 20, 1974, issue of The Dispatch, Carol Lowe wrote a very interesting and historically significant article regarding Cookeville native Anne Trigg Robinson (1874-1955). The publication presented a synopsis of the life of Anne Trigg Robinson as well as her love for, and contributions to, the history of Cookeville. As a 9th grade writing assignment in 1891, Robinson chose to write a brief history of the founding of Cookeville. One hundred and twenty years later, you and I are privileged to an historically correct treatise of the beginnings of Cookeville.

A brief history of Cookeville, by Anne Robinson, 9th grade, 1891:

Cookeville is situated on the Old Walton Road, which for a century has been the throughfare from Virginia and North Carolina. On Feb. 11, 1854, commissioners were appointed by the legislature to lay off the county site of Putnam County. These were R. D. Allison, J. W. McDaniel, W. H. Barnes, J. D. Hyder, and J. M. McKinney.

Twenty acres of land were bought from Charles Crook and laid off in lots with the exception of two and one half acres reserved for a public square. The first streets opened were Jefferson, East Spring Monroe, Glade, Narrow and Broad. The new town was named Cookeville, in honor of Colonel Richard Cooke.

The first lots were sold on July 13 and 14, 1854, bringing $25 to $167 each. The first sold for $167.25. There were no houses at first, but the town was dense by population by black-jacks and see-ticks. The first house was a log grocery near where the Cumberland Church now stands. Soon after, a temporary courthouse was erected on the lot now owned by Mr. A. W. Boyd. It has since been moved, and is known as “Shop” on Mr. Arnold’s place.

(Note: The log grocery was located on the north side of the current location of Broad Street between Jefferson Avenue and Dixie Avenue. The Boyd lot was located between the current location of Jefferson Avenue and Washington Avenue near Broad Street.)

The first county officers were Mr. P. Bohannon, sheriff; C. Mills, circuit court; Joe Pierson, tax collector; W. Gentry, trustee; B. D. Allison, chairman county court; and Dr. William Baker, register.

On June 10, 1854, the Clerk issued to Robert Hayes and Susan Hooten the first marriage license. They were married on June 12 by F. M. Patterson, a Missionary Baptist minister. The second license was issued to Russel Moore and Jenima Ray, who is now Mrs. Wheeler.

The first dry goods stores were those of Douglass, Moore and Company; Terry and Son and J. W. Crutcher. Mr. Freeze sold goods in the house he now occupies at a very early date. None of the men in town were over 30 years of age, and there were no older men here for several years, with the exception of Mr. McKinney. As there were no women in town for over a year, the first five businessmen kept bachelor’s hall in a log cabin 16 by 20 feet on the lot where Mr. Z. T. Hinds now lives.

(The Hines property was located on what is now E. Spring Street, near the courthouse.)

The first lawyers who came to Cookeville were Captain H. H. Dillard in 1855 and Mr. H. Denton in 1856. The first mentioned brought all his personal effects, consisting in the sack of books he rode on, and an extra pair of boots tied behind his saddle. These two lawyers are now among the most prominent in this district.
In the fall of 1854, Little Joe Copeland, who weighed only 250 pounds, began the first courthouse. It was finished early in January 1856, but was burned in February of the same year. It was rebuilt soon after, but again burned in 1857. The one now standing was built by Mr. D. L. Dow. Little Joe Copeland also built the jail in 1856.

In 1856, Mr. J. M. McKinney the proprietor of the first hotel, which is now the Cullum House, brought his wife and daughters here, one of whom is Mrs. Crutcher. These were the first ladies in Cookeville. Mrs. Crutcher’s daughter, now Mrs. Charlie Burton, was the first child born in Cookeville.

(The Cullum House stood near the intersection of Reagan Street and South Washington Avenue).

In 1856, Mrs. Cummins taught school in the house which had formerly been used as a courthouse. In the same year, Dr. William Baker founded the first newspaper, which was named the Cookeville Times. At this time Dr. Gabbert was the only physician in town but Dr. Allison came soon after. About this time, a tannery was begun on the place of Mrs. Mills by Hunter and Bohannan.

The first church was built in 1857 and was used as a union church, but is now the Methodist Church. Just before the war the academy was begun, but was not finished until after it.

(Before the Civil War, the Academy was Washington Academy and was located on Broad Street where the City Municipal Building is today).

H. C. Flemming was the first teacher. From the close of the war until the coming of the Nashville and Knoxville Rail Road the growth of the town was slow but steady. The big storm in 1878 blew out the south end of the academy and also the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, then in the course of erection. It was rebuilt in 1881, not long after the Christian Church.

“Cumberland Tales” created by Calvin Dickinson and Michael Birdwell, and sponsored by the Cookeville History Museum, welcomes any tale of this region’s history. For more information, contact Calvin Dickinson at cdickinson@tntech.edu and Michael Birdwell at birdie@tntech.edu

*Read more Cumberland Tales at: http://www.ajlambert.com