

DEAN OF TENNESSEE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

By Leonard W. Davis

Work Unit Conservationist

From 1953 to 1978

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Over the past 66 years many people have worked with the Soil Conservation District but one man has left an influence that is still felt today. Beecher C. Huddleston was 75 years old when he started serving as a Supervisor and Secretary of the Putnam County Soil Conservation District. I began to learn of him from the past board meeting minutes and records still in files at the local office. The following article was tucked neatly inside a folder and filed away where I found it not long ago. I would like to share with you this article that shows how the foresight and dedication of just one person can have a profound effect on the future. Kathy Tilton, SCD Office Manager.

As the sun rose on April 19, 1870, over the Cumberland mountains of the Eastern Highland Rim in Tennessee, another American patriot made his entrance on the stage of life: Beecher C. Huddleston, who was later to be known as the "Dean of Soil and Water Conservation Districts in Tennessee."

Brown of pioneer stock, B. C. Huddleston (later to be called "Judge" due to serving as County Judge of Putnam County from 1926 to 1942) inherited the zeal and tenacity that was characteristic of the early patriots for his country and the good earth that produced strong men.

In 1899, "Judge" purchased his first piece of land; a 40-acre tract originally owned by his grandfather, which was a part of a land grant for services rendered during the Revolutionary war. This land had been abandoned for many years because of erosion and low productivity, but the fabulous price of \$5.00 per acre almost exhausted the life savings of this young farmer.

The future looked dark for young B. C. Huddleston and his 4-year-old orphaned son (whose mother had died in 1895), but the land must be made to produce a living, thus, by necessity and the initiative of a pioneer heritage, Judge became a conservator of the soil.

Large earth moving equipment was not even a visionary dream in those days, so Mr. Huddleston cut brush to plug gullies, made rock dams, plowed in gullies with a team of mules, and began the long hard struggle with limited resources and "know how" toward reclaiming a worthless, washed away farm.

The struggle for survival continued with a slow uphill trend to progress until 1938. In 1938, the dawn of a new era in conservation farming began - the Soil Conservation District movement in Tennessee was initiated. Putnam County was among the first to take advantage of this new approach to land management, in 1940 (being sixth in the state to organize) and was ready for operation as a legal functioning district in September, 1941.

New ideas in those days were hard to sell and much hard work was needed to enlighten farmers of Putnam County to the need for a Soil Conservation District. "Judge" Huddleston as he was commonly known in those days, was determined not to let this opportunity slip by the grasp of Putnam farmers. The long tireless task of reclaiming his worthless 40 with little knowledge as to land use and treatment, was too fresh in his memory, with the present frustration over, what could be done further to make his land productive without washing it away. "Judge" had reached the end of his rope of knowledge in soil conservation, and the ray of hope held out to his people through this new organization must be accomplished. The fight was on, with the "Judge" leading his people to victory.

After the Putnam Soil Conservation District was organized, "Judge" received a basic Soil and Water Conservation plan on his farm, which had grown from the original 40 acres to 180 acres, through the purchase of additional tracts adjoining him.

The challenge of the District movement, linked with the need for what districts offered landowners in his local Soil Conservation District, prompted the "Judge" to run for Soil Conservation District Supervisor in 1944, and he was elected by an over-whelming vote then, and for the next five consecutive times, with an accumulated total of 18 years of service to the district.

At the first meeting of the local Board of Supervisors after the election in 1944, Mr. Huddleston was elected Secretary and Treasurer and held this position by annual election until his retirement at the end of his term in December, 1961.

Although "Judge" Huddleston was not an official of the District Board of Supervisors until 1944, his association with the movement began in 1940, soon after the State Legislature passed the enabling act in 1938. Since this date, the hours of service rendered the Soil Conservation District movement in Putnam County, State of Tennessee, and the southeastern region of the United States have been enormous.

In August, 1946, the "Judge" and five other supervisors in Tennessee met on the campus of Peabody College in Nashville, and organized the Tennessee Association of Soil Conservation District. At this time, he was elected Vice-President for Middle Tennessee.

Then, in 1954 the Tennessee Watershed District Act was passed, which enabled small watersheds to organize and carry out works of improvement under PL-566. "Judge" was instrumental in assisting watershed leaders to organize into the Dry Valley and Roaring River Watershed Districts. These districts cover portions of Putnam County. Today, the Roaring River watershed is being planned.

Through the years, Judge Huddleston missed only one local district board meeting, due to illness, and did not miss a single Area or State meeting in 18 years of service. At the last State meeting in 1961, the 92-year-old Dean of Soil & Water Conservation in Tennessee, rose to his feet with tears in his eyes, and a tremble in his strong clear voice, and gave the challenge to the thousand-plus delegates that will continue to bring down through the ages: "For our Nation to remain strong, this organization must continue to be always on the move toward a more vigorous district program."

The small desk in the corner of the local Soil Conservation District office, where "Judge" spent long hours corresponding with district cooperators, State and National Leaders concerning soil and water conservation, is now missing. The "Dean" has retired at 92 from official duty. But all who know him can be assured of one thing "As the sun sets behind the western hills of his beloved Soil Conservation District, Judge Huddleston will still be concerned with the inheritance God gave us all - The Good Earth."

HUDDLESTONS OBSERVE 60TH ANNIVERSARY

By Alice Keith Ford

It was a homey visit enjoyed with Judge and Mrs. Beecher Huddleston on Sunday at their home on Lowe Avenue when an informal wedding anniversary celebration was observed. While the gathering of the family was informal the event was outstanding at their 60th wedding date was February 18 but due to the snow and various hindrances the family couldn't be with them until Sunday when a special dinner was served at the noon time.

Following dinner when some guests arrived the Judge was busily involved in feeding his pet kittens and no pictures were available until the daily task was completed to his especial liking but he thereafter was an affable host throughout the friendly visits.

He and Mrs. Huddleston native Putnam countians and members of pioneer families chatted interestingly as they reminisced they told of their wedding day of 60 years ago. Both had been previously married, she was Mrs. Ruth Hyder Walker and he had one daughter Myrtle, who attended the wedding and the Judge's only son Clarence, was too small to be present. As they recalled the day Judge told of his coming to town, then quite a journey from the present suburban Salem community, the home place of the Huddleston family, to

secure the license from Henry Carr the county court clerk, also a Presbyterian minister, who the next day went to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Birch Dowell also members of pioneer families, the scene of the wedding to perform the ceremony. It was snowing just about like it has been yesterday and today, the Judge recalled and Mrs. Huddleston added my daughter, Myrtle now Mrs. Frank LeRoy of El Cajon, Calif. And Emma Dowell, Mrs. D. J. Wade of the Monterey road are the only ones living besides us who were present that day. The Dowell place on the Monterey road is now owned by Mr. and Mrs. Willard McCormick, who reside there.

The Bible, a wedding present to Judge Huddleston's mother from her father is one of his prize possession as are numerous pictures of the two families and other antiques. One of especial interest was their 50th anniversary picture, incidentally although they are then years older neither look it. In this connection they are still actively engaged in the civic, religious and educational interests of their county and town. Mrs. Huddleston is a charter member of the Salem-Home Demonstration club, attends church group meetings and last summer she practically stole the show at the various parties given to her bride granddaughter, Mrs. Robert Epley.

Judge Huddleston who served as county judge for a period of sixteen years continues to be Secretary of Putnam Soil Conservation District board and other organizations, and on Saturday, their daughter, Mrs. Arnold Hunter, was busily engaged in having a group picture made but it was an impossibility as her father had to attend a Putnam Co-op meeting and had numerous activities for the day regardless of the rare event and the snow storm.

Furthering the pleasurable visit was sharing the anniversary cake and sipping coffee as seated at the dining room table centered with a gift bouquet of red roses and white gladiolus. The conversation as enjoyed with the cordial hosts, their son, Willis Huddleston, Mrs. Huddleston, Mrs. Clarence Huddleston, Mr. and Mrs. Hunter, Mrs. S. C. Huddleston, Mr. and Mrs. Beveredge Huddleston, Mrs. Rush Hunter and Miss Mildred Wilhite, all near relatives and life long friends. Clarence Huddleston who came from Alabama to be with his parents for the day had returned and Charles Huddleston, a grandson, there at the dinner hour, had gone at this time.

Judge Huddleston is the son of William and Caroline Davis Huddleston and Mrs. Huddleston's parents were Crockett and Sophia Dowell Hyder of the Popular Grove community.

Mr. and Mrs. LeRoy were the only members of the immediate family absent and absent also were several grandchildren.

Though quietly observed the day provided much happiness for the honored two as it did for those privileged to share it with them and with their current interest, energy, contributions to the pleasure of others and their looking forward to their 61st wedding anniversary.

Salem Cemetery, Putnam Co., TN

*Beecher C. Huddleston, b. April 1870, TN – d. 1968, s/o William Huddleston & Susannah Caroline Davis
*Ruth (Hyder) Huddleston, b. May 1872, TN – d. 1967, d/o J. Crockett Hyder & Sophia A. Dowell.

*William E. Huddleston, b. 14 January 1846, TN – d. 24 November 1932
*Susannah Huddleston, b. 30 June 1842, TN – d. 10 October 1922

*J. Crockett Hyder, b. 25 July 1839, TN – d. 24 September 1927
*Sophia A. (Dowel) Hyder, b. 13 November 1839 – d. 6 February 1912

*Stephen Coey Huddleston, 25 March 1876, TN – d. 7 May 1957
*Mollie A. Huddleston, b. 16 April 1885, TN – d. 18 February 1968

Lola Mildred Huddleston, b. 21 March 1919- d. 1 May 1922, d/o Stephen Coey & Mollie A. Huddleston.

Beverage Martin Huddleston, b. 17 April 1872, TN – d. 10 May 1963

(1870 census 1st Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN: Dwl: 99 - **J. F. Huddleston** is head of household, 45 yrs. old, TN (value of real estate, 1,200) (value of personal estate, 800) md to **Mary**, 47 yrs. old, TN. Children: Mary J., 13 yrs. old; John W., 11 yrs. old; Margret F., 19 yrs. old; Jordan D., 6 yrs. old & Mandy A. Huddleston, 4 yrs. old. All born in TN).

(1870 census 1st Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN: Dwl: 100 - **J. F. Huddleston** is head of household, 24 yrs. old, TN md to **Susan C.**, 27 yrs. old, TN. Children: **Bucher C. Huddleston**, 0 yrs. old, b. 1/12 April, TN).

Census Place: 1880 District 1, Putnam Co., Tennessee

Source: FHL Film 1255275 National Archives Film T9-1275 Page 89A
Dwl: 216 Family: 216

	Relation	Sex	Marr	Race	Age	Birthplace
Wm. HUDDLESTON	Self	M	M	W	34	TN
	Occ: Farmer	Fa: TN	Mo: TN			
S.C. HUDDLESTON	Wife	F	M	W	36	TN
	Occ: Keeping House	Fa: TN	Mo: TN			
Beecher HUDDLESTON	Son	M	S	W	10	TN
	Fa: TN	Mo: TN				
<i>(Beecher C. Huddleston md Ruth Hyder)</i>						
B.M. HUDDLESTON	Son	M	S	W	8	TN
	Fa: TN	Mo: TN				
<i>(Beveridge Martin Huddleston md Martha Nettie)</i>						
Stephen HUDDLESTON	Son	M	S	W	4	TN
	Fa: TN	Mo: TN				
<i>(Stephen Coey Huddleston md Mollie A.)</i>						

Census Place: 1880 District 3, Putnam Co., Tennessee

Source: FHL Film 1255275 National Archives Film T9-1275 Page 100B
Dwl: 89 Family: 113

	Relation	Sex	Marr	Race	Age	Birthplace
Crocket HYDER	Self	M	M	W	40	TN
	Occ: Farmer	Fa: TN	Mo: TN			
Sofa HYDER	Wife	F	M	W	40	TN
	Occ: Keeping House	Fa: TN	Mo: TN			
Tennessee HYDER	Dau	F	S	W	18	TN
	Occ: Work In House	Fa: ---	Mo: ---			
Perley HYDER	Dau	F	S	W	15	TN
	Fa: ---	Mo: ---				
Dona HYDER	Dau	F	S	W	13	TN
	Fa: ---	Mo: ---				
Martha HYDER	Dau	F	S	W	10	TN
	Fa: ---	Mo: ---				
Lovey HYDER	Dau	F	S	W	9	TN
	Fa: ---	Mo: ---				
Rutha HYDER	Dau	F	S	W	7	TN
	Fa: ---	Mo: ---				
Whitley HYDER	Son	M	S	W	2	TN
	Fa: ---	Mo: ---				

(1900 census 1st Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN: Dwl: 93 - **William Huddleston** is head of household, 52 yrs. old, b. January 1848, TN md 32 yrs. to **Caroline**, 48 yrs. old, b. June 1844, TN, 3 children born, 3 children living. Children: Cory Huddleston, 24 yrs. old, b. March 1875, TN).

(1900 census 1st Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN: Dwl: 94 - **Beecher Huddleston** is head of household, 30 yrs. old, b. April 1870, TN md 2 yrs. to **Ruthie**, 28 yrs. old, b. May 1872, TN, 2 children born, 2 children



In the Fall 1955, Beecher Huddleston, SCD, Supervisor.

living. Children: Myrtle, 9 yrs. old, b. September 1890, TN & Clarence Huddleston, 4 yrs. old, b. November 1895, TN).

(1910 census 1st Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN: Dwl: 214 – **Beecher Huddleston** is head of household, 40 yrs. old, TN M2, md 12 yrs. to **Ruth E.**, 37 yrs. old, TN, M2, 4 children born, 3 children living. Children: Myrtle, 19 yrs. old; Charlie C., 14 yrs. old; Willis J., 5 yrs. old & Vallie E. Huddleston, 3 yrs. old. All born in TN).

(1910 census 1st Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN: Dwl: 216 – **Bevridge M. Huddleston** is head of household, 37 yrs. old, TN md 16 yrs. to **Martha N.**, 37 yrs. old, TN, 8 children born, 7 children living. Children: Perry H. 15 yrs. old; Howard W., 13 yrs. old; Arlie B., 11 yrs. old; Houston W., 9 yrs. old; Floria A., 7 yrs. old; Oscar N., 5 yrs. old & Franklin E. Huddleston, 0/12 yrs. old. All born in TN).

(1910 census 1st Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN: Dwl: 217 – **Stephen C. Huddleston** is head of household, 34 yrs. old, TN md 8 yrs. to **Mollie A.**, 25 yrs. old, TN, 1 child born. Child: Owen E. Huddleston, 3/12 yrs. old, TN. Also living in the household: Bird Boatman, servant, 20 yrs. old, TN).

(1910 census 1st Civil Dist., Huddleston Rd., Putnam Co., TN: Dwl: 219 - **William C. Huddleston** is head of household, 65 yrs. old, TN md 43 yrs. to **Susanna**, 67 yrs. old, TN. Living in the household: Jordon F. Huddleston, father, 84 yrs. old, TN NC NC, widow),

(1920 census 1st Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN: Dwl: 103 – **B. M. Huddleston** is head of household, 47 yrs. old, TN md to **Nettie**, 46 yrs. old, TN. Children: Flora Ann, 16 yrs. old; Oscar, 15 yrs. old; Earl, 10 yrs. old & Lorelle Huddleston, 4+ yrs. old. All born in TN).

(1920 census 1st Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN: Dwl: 106 – **William Huddleston** is head of household, 74 yrs. old, TN md to **S. C.**, 77 yrs. old, TN)

(1920 census 1st Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN: Dwl: 107 – **Coey Huddleston** is head of household, 44 yrs. old, TN md to **Mollie**, 34 yrs. old, TN. Children: son Huddleston & dau. Mildred Huddleston).

(1920 census 1st Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN: Dwl: 108 – **Beecher Huddleston** is head of household, 49 yrs. old, TN md to **Ruth**, 47 yrs. old, TN. Children: Clarence, 24 yrs. old; Willis, 15 yrs. old & Vallie Huddleston, 12 yrs. old. All born in TN. Also living in the household Myrtle (Huddleston) Walker, step dau., 28 yrs. old, TN, single, occupation, millinery, dry goods store Louise Walker, step-daughter, 7 yrs. old, TN and **J. C. Hyder, father-in-law**, 80 yrs. old, TN, widow

(1930 census Cookeville Twp. East part, Lowe Ave., Putnam Co., TN: House: 105 Dwl: 316 – **Beecher C. Huddleston** is head of household, 59 yrs. old, TN (25 yrs. old 1st marriage), occupation, Judge County, md to **Ruth**, 58 yrs. old, TN, (17 yrs. old 1st marriage. Children: Charles C., 34 yrs. old, TN, occupation, electrician motor company; Willis J., Huddleston, 25 yrs. old, TN & Flemming J. Huddleston, nephew, 19 yrs. old, TN, occupation, truck driver county).

Nash Cemetery, Putnam Co., TN

*Asher LaFever, b. 15 October 1890 – d. 29 June 1968

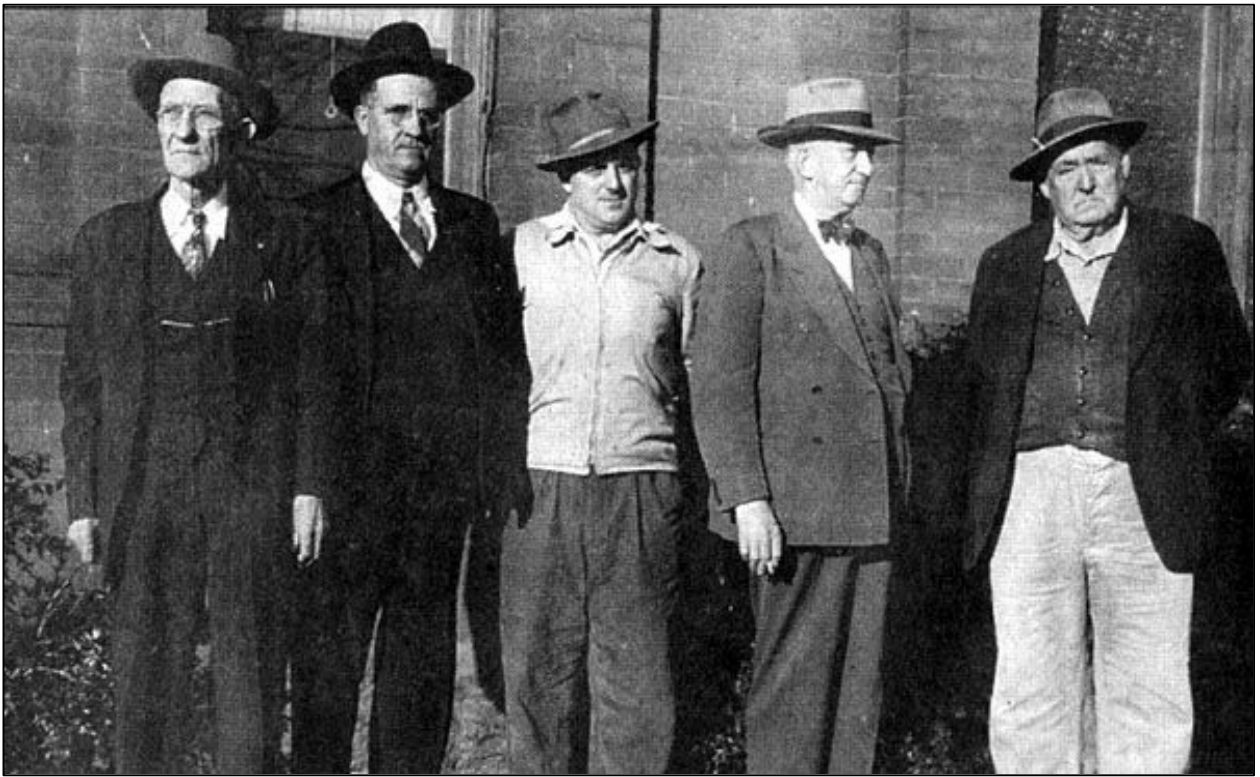
*Minnie LaFever, b. 23 November 1895 – d. 5 July 1980

Hop T. Lee Cemetery, Putnam Co., TN

*B. M. Lee, b. 24 September 1884 – d. 31 March 1955

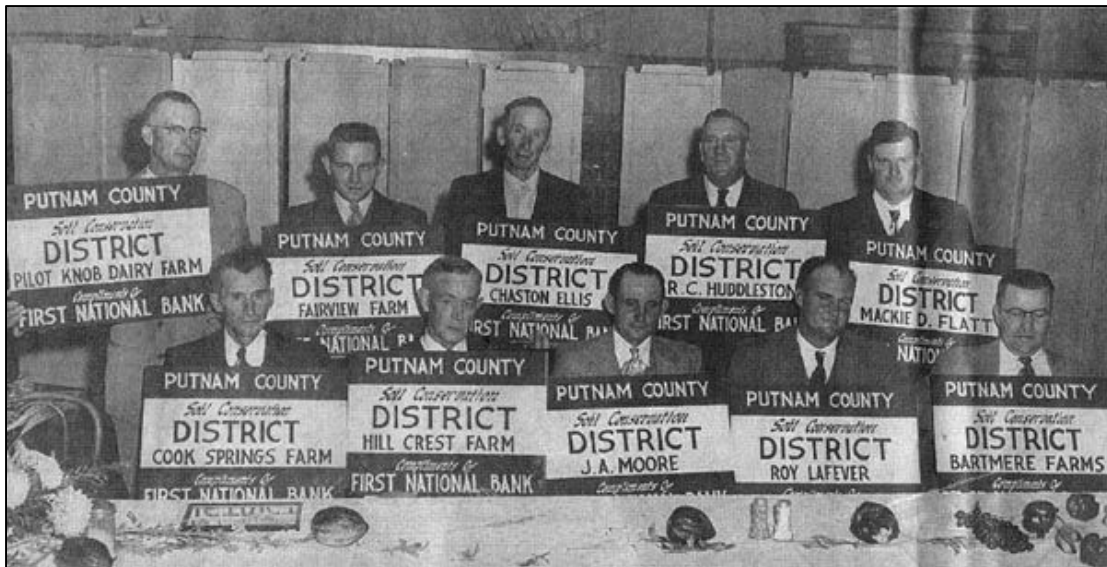
(last wife, Elna Grisson)

<http://www.ajlambert.com>



In 1967, District Supervisors, left to right: B. C. Huddleston, secretary, Asher Lafever, chairman, Joe Scott, Charlie Darwin and B. M. Lee.

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This picture, taken at the 1953 Annual SCD Banquet, shows the first winners who received the Cooperators Mailbox Signs. From left, front row: J. D. Piles, J. N. McCloud, J. A. Moore, Ray Lafever and Clarence Bartlett. Back row: J. J. Wright, Martin Wright, Chaston Ellis, Clinnie Huddleston and Mackie D. Flatt.

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