



Early History of Cookeville, TN
The following is a reprint of an article
which appeared in the Cookeville Press,
Thursday, June 13, 1895.
Upper Cumberland Genealogical
Association – Vol. XIV, No.3 – Fall
1989

“AFTER FORTY YEARS”
by William Baker

Forty years. How many and great changes sometimes occur in the lapse of forty years at this age of the world, more and greater than were witnessed in a half life-time in the patriarchal age when men lived to the advanced age of nearly a thousand years.

Putnam County's Courthouse early 1900's.

Great changes have taken place here in the town of Cookeville and vicinity in the past forty years, and during the absence of the writer during these years. And no one realizes it so much as he does on his recent return. He was here at the laying off of the town, and witnessed the driving of the stake designating the exact center of the county and the site of the court house by Col. Don Allison, now a patriarch of the great state of Texas, in his 85th year. And he was one of the first men who began to improve the new town, building a residence, a boarding house and an office. He was also the first register of deeds and started and ran the first newspaper published in the town, the Cookeville Times. So that with two other men, Maj. J C Freeze & Capt. H H Dillard the only two the original settlers now living here, he was a witness of the organization of the county and the laying of the corner stone of the town forty-one years ago.

It was, at that time, in its beginning “the day of small things,” and continued to be so for more than a decade, a small village of three or four hundred inhabitants. At the time of its location there was a survey for a railroad, the Southwestern made running near the place from McMinnville via Sparta to extend to the Kentucky line in Overton County, with some work done on it. But the town was doomed to wait some twenty five years for the whistle of the engine. And when it came it was on a road constructed from Lebanon, having for its terminus the city of Knoxville. And which brought with it a building boom, extending the town far beyond its original limits into what is called West Cookeville, besides extending the original plat on all sides, with neat and substantial buildings, residences, and business houses, making it one of the neatest and most inviting towns of this mountain region, consisting of a dozen or fifteen business houses, a neat courthouse, five churches, four schools, four hotels, one weekly paper, and several manufactories - roller grist mill, saw mill, two planing mills, one tan yard, with extensive lumber yards. And what is a little remarkable, the first lawyer and first merchant are still here doing a good business. There are now some 1500 inhabitants, many of them prominent citizens and leading men in their lines of business and professions. Another thing worthy of note is that the people are all, or about all, church goers, while one—third or more of all the

inhabitants are members of the different evangelical churches. Besides the improvements already in existence there is contemplated the erection of a high school building to cost \$6,000.00, steps for which are now being taken. Then there is a daily connection with Nashville by railway.

One of the greatest and most important changes is in the moral aspect of the place, which no one can see as the writer does, and the few aged citizens who still linger on the stage of life. From the beginning of the town and for years after, drinking and whiskey selling had unlimited sway. Whiskey stops were almost as common as business houses. But what a change. An enterprising, industrious, sober, intelligent town that would do credit to any section of the State, not a saloon in four miles of the place, with a presiding circuit court judge who is determined to kill every "blind tiger" and "wild cat" in the county.

"But the change that impresses the writer most is the absence of the men who were his contemporaries during his former residence here, who have passed away, one by one, until their number scarcely exceeds a dozen in the town and surrounding country, and what few remain, like himself, have grown old.

Another work looking to the future. But few country towns have a brighter future in prospect than Cookeville. Situated upon a plane extending from 12 to 15 miles from the breaks of the Cumberland mountains, three miles on the East, with a mulatto soil so fine for fruit growing, with the finest freestone water, pure and healthful air, it is not exceeded by any place in the mountain region. Then its railroad which will soon become a trunk road with its crossing, connecting Knoxville with the city of Nashville will open up an important and direct line shortened some 150 miles between these two points, making it a great thoroughfare of trade from the East to the West and Southwest, inviting immigration and capital.

William Baker, Cookeville, June 10, 1895

From the Cookeville Press, August 15, 1895:

"Last Thursday afternoon Dr. William Baker died very suddenly of heart disease. He was apparently in good health and was sitting on the bedside when he fell back dead. Dr. Baker figured conspicuously in the early history of Putnam County, being elected the first Register in 1854 when the county was organized. He was publisher of the first newspaper in Cookeville, it being the Times, and which he continued to publish until 1860 when he moved away. Some months ago, he removed to this place where he lived till the end came at which time he was nearly eighty years of age. Dr. Baker was the father of Dr. W.W. Baker of Bloomington and R.P. Baker of Honey Grove, Texas. His life was an honorable upright Christian one, and upon which will be reflected the kindest memory."

Rev. William Baker – b. 25 February 1816, VA – d. 8 August 1895, Cookeville, TN
Buried: Cookeville City Cemetery, Cookeville, TN.

Source:

24 YEARS AGO: Bob McMillan

Herald-Citizen Newspaper Staff: Cookeville, TN:

Looking back in history, here were some of the happenings in the Cookeville area for the week of March 28-April 3, 2004 as recorded in the pages of the Herald-Citizen:

* Cookeville City Council learned this week that the Cookeville City Cemetery isn't actually owned by the city after all. The city has routinely budgeted funds for its operation for years. Now, city officials have learned that the actual owner of the cemetery where some of the city's most prominent figures rest is hard to determine due to a tangled trail of deeds.

Part of it was established in 1927 by a private corporation. Another was begun in the 1940s. They grew together over the years. Meanwhile, in 1964, one of the groups asked the city to take it over. Everyone forgot about the second group. Figuring out who owns what could take some time, officials say. (April 2, 1980)

(Herald Newspaper, Cookeville, TN Jan 8. 1908) George W. Nackles, secretary and treasurer for the Cookeville City Cemetery, gives the cemetery report for 1907 on page one this week.

The cemetery earned and spent \$54.20 during the year. It earned \$2.50 on the sale of lots and \$9.80 on the sale of hay from the property. The Civic League also donated \$25,000. It spent \$32.85 on labor, \$7.20 for grass seed, \$11.50 for fertilizer and \$2.65 on tools.

Seventeen were laid to rest during 1907, and the total there now stands at 267.

ajlambert.com