

PUTNAM COUNTY HIGHWAYS A ROADMAP TO SUCCESS

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By Glenn Jones and Carol Bradford, for the Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, Putnam Co., TN.

Ancient roads were constructed on the highest ground for two reasons.



One, it allowed for better visibility to protect the traveler from ambush and attack. Another, to better keep the road from flooding and reducing mud problems. Now many main roads from town to town are called highways.

This 1962 photo features **June Swallows Lewis** standing behind a 1959 Chevy Impala on the graveled shoulder of the new Interstate 40 near the old Baxter Road exit by the Tennessee Central Railroad overpass. Lewis is now the director of the Baxter Visitor's Center and history museum.

Before this territory became Tennessee, it was known as the North Carolina Territory. In 1787, North Carolina ordered a road to be cut from the mouth of the Little Tennessee River (now Knoxville area) westward to the French Lick (now Nashville).

Peter Avery, a hunter who was familiar with the area, was directed by the North Carolina Legislature to mark out a trail westward through the wilderness to French Lick on the Cumberland River. This trail was to be 10 feet wide, and trees would be marked to guide travelers.

Much of the terrain was steep and rough, which made it only suitable for walking travelers and pack horses. This new road was known by several names: The North Carolina Road, Avery Trace and The Wilderness Road.

In 1788, the Avery Trace opened. This was the first road from East Tennessee to the Nashville area, and the only such road for eight years (1788-1796). It passed from present day Monterey, down Brotherton Mountain to Algood, to Cookeville and Double Springs and northwest down Flynn's Creek to Flynn's Lick, then crossed the Cumberland River, westward to Nashville.

Many notable people traveled the Avery Trace: **Andrew Jackson**, **Gov. William Blount**, **The Duke of New Orleans** (who later became the **King of France**), **Bishop Francis Asbury** and French botanist **Andrew Michaux**.

In 1795, a new westward route was made at Double Springs. Instead of going northwest, following the old Avery Trace down Flynn's Creek, a road was constructed between Double Springs and Carthage, closely following present-day Highway 70N. This new road was built by **William Walton** and was known as the Walton Road.

Later, the Walton Road extended eastward from Double Springs toward the Knoxville area, many times following the old Avery Trace.

In 1821, the fourth post office road authorized in Tennessee by the U.S. Congress was the Tompkinsville, Ky., to Gainesboro to Sparta road. This road passed through present day Double Springs, closely following Pippin, Plunk Whitson, Hawkins Crawford, Bennett and Ditty roads.

Travel has always been an important part of Putnam County's past — and present — economy. **Alexander Crawford** built the Nashville and Knoxville Railroad and was planning to extend it eastward to Knoxville when he died in 1890, the same year the railroad reached Cookeville. Later **Jere Baxter** purchased the railroad and extended it to Harriman and changed its name to the Tennessee Central.

The railroad opened up Putnam County to new markets all over the country. Later, new roads that lead to hauling goods by truck began the decline of the railroad through Putnam County.

In the early 1930s, a new federal road was being built to replace the old Tennessee State Highway 24 that extended the entire east-west length of Putnam County. The new road was completed in 1935 and named US 70N. It was boasted as the newest and fastest way to cross the state.

Also in 1935, several state roads were completed around Putnam County. The new Hwy. 56 from Baxter to Smithville was completed, as well as the new Cookeville to Hilham road (Hwy 135).

In 1962, another important road called the super highway came through Putnam County.

A section of Interstate 40 was completed that year between Carthage and Cookeville.

Motorists no longer had to take Hwy. 70N through the western part of Putnam County.

At that time, Hwy. 70N's long and winding route was known as the "Dip and Twist."

Sections of the new I-40 were completed at different times throughout the state.

A section of the new north-south highway (Hwy. 111) was completed in Putnam County in the late 1970s. It began at state Hwy. 42 and Pigeon Roost Creek Road and went north, crossing I-40, and ending at Hwy. 70 N.

Later the route going north was changed. Hwy. 111 was routed to follow the new Algood bypass and on to Livingston.

Road improvements continue to influence the quality of life. With work being done on the new Exit 283 of I-40 — the Fifth Interchange — the future looks great for Putnam County.

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*Read more about the history of Putnam Co., TN & surrounding areas at:
'Forgotten Crossroads' History of Putnam County, TN: <http://www.ajlambert.com>