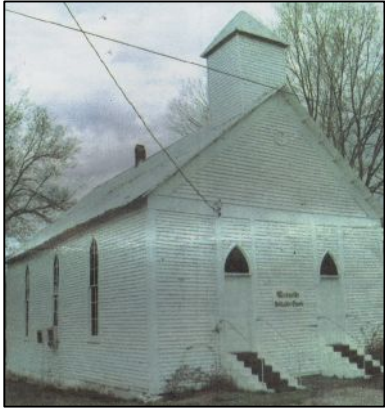


GRANVILLE, TN: ONCE A RIVERBOAT TOWN

By Carl F. Ledbetter



From about 1831 to about 1925, everything came to Granville by boat. Those were grand days, the riverboats brought the best merchandise to Granville and farmers shipped their products on them. That little river town once boomed. Kelly's Store housed many shops and was unique in its own way. Kelly's was a department store but it also contained a drug store, millinery shop and barber shop. In addition, Kelly's had a shoe department, hardware and furniture. If it existed today, it might be known as "Kelly's Mall." In the early seventies it was torn down.

Over half a century has passed since the whistle from the riverboat echoed from the hills of Granville. Granville has experienced both sides of the growth and decline of a community.

The founding of Granville started shortly after 1800. Nine families came from North Carolina to settle in a community called Beech Hill. A huge brick house was built on a hillside by Colonel James Webb Smith. Colonel Smith came from Granville, North Carolina. Some of the families who came with Colonel Smith were Shepherd, Montgomery, Tittle, page, Williamson, Ragland, Kelly, Duke, Burton and Terry. Named for the county they had left, the community would someday be called Granville.

In 1829 Granville was a wilderness. In that year the Acts of Legislature authorized Augustine Shepherd to lay off a town on his land. The town was named Shepherdsville, later Granville. In 1837-38 Granville was incorporated.

In 1831 the first steamboat made the 141-mile trip to Granville from Nashville. In 1833, a huge steamboat, The Jefferson stopped in Granville for a huge tobacco shipment. By 1845, there were 45 steamboats run-fling the Cumberland River from Burnside, Kentucky to Nashville.

Living along the Cumberland River in the 1800's had been compared to living by the interstate today although it was much more personal. The boats sometimes stayed three or four days to get unloaded. The captain, clerks, chambermaids and crew became well liked with the residents.

In 1840 David Shepherd built a store on the bank of Martin's Creek. Shepherd was a man wealthy in land and money. He hired some men to blaze and build a road from Shepherdsville to the location of Highway 56. This was the old Shepherdsville Road.

Granville became a center for education in the late 1800's and early 1900's. Several private schools were located there. One school, the Granville Seminary was incorporated in 1849-50 but it is not known if it ever opened. Dr. B. L. Simmons practiced medicine in

Granville for many years. Dr. Simmons was not pleased with the Granville public schools and hired a private tutor for his children. This created an interest in others and soon the Granville Private School was established in 1912. Classes were held in the Church of Christ building. The class was restricted to twenty-five pupils. The students furnished their own desks.

Shortly another private school was in operation in Granville. This school was on Clover Street and operated by Miss Betty Williams, once a teacher at the Granville Private School.

Founded by Dr. Benjamin L. Smith, the Cumberland Valley Preparatory School brought new techniques in education as well as new subjects to the area. The school had clay tennis courts, a basketball court, an open air gym with the athletic bars and other equipment.

Dr. Simmons was also a partner in organizing this school. He hired the first teachers from Illinois, Mr. and Mrs. R. T. Allen. Not only were they responsible for introducing sports to the area schools but they brought debating, forensics and public speaking into the system. Dr. Simmons' foresight was remarkable for his time. He was willing to capitalize on the ideas and knowledge of the Allen's and share it with his students.

When the steamboat blew its whistle the whole school would break up. Children would race 200 feet to the river bank to watch a riverboat come in.

The big days of the steamboats was from 1890 to 1912. By 1920 the riverboats on the Cumberland began to decline. The Jo Horton Fall was the last to leave Granville in 1928. The modern automobile would soon dominate. Trucks would haul tobacco, livestock and produce to Nashville and the automobile began to haul passengers.

Granville's shipping days were over. The crowds began to disappear, one by one the stores closed. Soon there were no schools. Granville was becoming a ghost town.

The late Dr. Luther Freeman practiced medicine past the age of 90. In 1971, Dr. Freeman told this story about Granville for the Nashville Tennessean.

Once Dr. Freeman set out from Granville to Nashville by boat to accompany a seriously ill patient to a hospital there. They ran into a bad storm. When they tried to back into the main stream of the river they ran into trouble. "It was night and the wind was wild," Dr. Freeman recalled. "We were caught in the bend of the river, between tree tops on one side and a high rock bluff on the other. The livestock on board were frightened. In the fierce wind, the bow of the boat was tossed up and a hole knocked in its side.

"Finally, they pushed the boat off the landing and got it to shallow water on the other side of the river. Passengers were taken off in little canoes. Dr. Freeman and some other passengers paddled a shaky canoe to the Granville side of the river – just in time.

“Just as we got out of the canoe, the whole bottom dropped out of it, and it sank for good,” Dr. Freeman said.

Canoes were not the only boats to sink in the Cumberland near Granville. The John W. Hart sank just above Granville near the Lower Holliman Island on April 5, 1895. The I. T. Rhea sank on the following day at the head of Brook’s Island on the Cumberland.

The river has changed somewhat since it was dammed up to make the Cordell Hull Reservoir. It is now a perfect place for vacationers.

The Granville Marina and Resort offers a variety of recreational facilities. A restaurant is also located there. The town is unique. Granville is a historical community. There are a few buildings remaining that deserve restoration. The potential of Granville should not be taken lightly.

Only 30 miles from Cookeville and 15 miles from Interstate 40 and Carthage, it is not remote. The beauty of the steep mountains, known as “Little Switzerland” have the atmosphere of a place isolated from the everyday world.



A drive to Granville offers a reward in the past. And while there, Granville has a bank, marina, grocery store and gas station for you needs. Most important, Granville offers the earth’s beauty in every direction. The 1931 bank pictured left has been well preserved in Granville.

Clemons General Merchandise, (pictured right) once busy, now abandoned. The potential for preservation still exists.



Thanks to Mrs. Moldon Jenkins Tayse, Mrs. Christine Jones and The Tennessean for their contributions

ajlambert.com



The Dr. L.M. Freeman Bridge with the sharp, steep mountains makes an unusual sight on a foggy, misty morning.



The unique Presbyterian Church with two steeples sits about a block from the main highway.