

The Central Basin of Putnam County

Only the western edge of Putnam Country lies in the Basin. Formed when the Highland rim eroded and its escarpment receded to its present position, this basin, cut by Indian Creek, which drains it to the south, and Martin Creek, which flows north, is a region of low-lying hills, ravines, and knobs. Five hundred to one thousand feet above sea level, it is slightly warmer and drier than the higher elevations of the county. Here the soil, younger and less leached than soils in the rest of the county, contains more calcium and other elements and is rich in phosphorus. Much of it is deep brown and fertile. Because of its alkaline composition, none of the acid plants of the plateau grow here. Travelers noted, instead, stands of cedar and an increasing number of canebrakes.

In extreme southwest Putnam lies Buffalo Valley, dissected by Indian Creek, possessing the most naturally fertile land in the county. In the 1850's, farms of the Coggins, Exums, Garners, Johnsons, Merritts, and Stephens crowded along its creek bottoms, once filled with cane and trod by woods buffalo and elk.

The old Walton Road passed the large farm of Joseph Allison and reached the Pekin community in western Putnam County. A mile farther west some transients spent the night at an inn formerly operated by James and Bob McKinley and still known as the "McKinley Stand." At the general store there they could purchase supplies for the next day's journey and perhaps meet some of the neighboring farmers, the Apples, Browns, Elrods, Holladays, Jareds, Lees, and Sadlers. Sometimes they mailed letters describing their trip to friends back East.

What might these travelers through Putnam county have written in such letter? Certainly they would have recounted the difficulties of the journey through the isolated region; but perhaps they would also have told of the interesting topography, the varied flora and fauna, and the wild beauty of the new county.