

## **Putnam Founded on 6 June 1854**

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Letters to the Editor

By Thelma Moore Johnson

In research concerning the naming of Putnam County for Israel Putnam, soldier of the Revolutionary War, and also for his grandson, Albigeance Waldo Putnam, member of the Tennessee Historical Association, we have discovered a fact of historical significance.

According to all known sources, Putnam County was founded in 1854. At that time, a deed for transfer dated June 6, 1854, of 40 acres of land from Charles Crook to Russell B. Allison, chairman of Putnam County Court, was recorded by Russell Moore, Clerk of the Court. The purchase price was \$100.00.

This particular piece of ground was chosen because it contained a spring which would furnish water for the new community of Cookeville, the county seat. On Saturday, December 9, 1854, a notice was displayed in the Sparta Herald announcing the sale of lots around the new courthouse, and the lots were duly sold in December to the following: R. D. Allison, Farley/Davis, Sloan, Perkins, Hutchinson, Freeze, Wiggins, Brown, McDearmon, Harris, S. D. Burton, J. C. Fletcher, John Buck, M.G. Gentry, Adrew Ferrell, J. M. Goodpasture, Washington Academy and J. W. Crutcher.

All apparently went well, but on July 2, 1855, another deed was recorded for the same property as the first. The deeds are identical except for the dates and the fact that the first one does not bear the name of the County Registrar of Deeds.

We have asked the assistance of the manuscript and documents expert at the Tennessee State Library and Archives in discovering the reason for the second deed. The only explanation seems to be that the omission of the name of the registrar caused second thoughts and resulted in the correction of what may have been a discrepancy. At any rate, at this point the courthouse had been built, the lots surrounding it sold and county business was being carried on with dispatch.


We can only surmise at this distance of a century and a half that the second deed seemed necessary to the fastidious inclinations of the town founders.

This is intended to clarify previous information as to the actual date of establishment of Cookeville. The erroneous date of July 2, 1855, was taken as an end to the search and the prior deed was discovered more or less by accident. The reason for two deeds for the same property dated a year apart will remain a mystery.

THELMA MOORE JOHNSON – PRESIDENT UC GENEALOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Putnam, county ( 408 sq mi/1,057 sq km; 1990 pop. 51,373), central Tenn.; ☉Cookeville; 36°08'N 85°30'W. Hilly timber and farm region on Cumberland Plateau; drained by affluents of Cumberland R. Includes part of Center Hill Reservoir (Caney Fork R.). Agr. (small grains, tobacco, corn, apples, hay; poultry, cattle, hogs); lumbering; granite

quarrying, oil and gas deposits. Diverse mfg. at Cookeville (motor vehicle parts, candy, wood prods.). Formed 1842.

Capital city or county seat is shown by the symbol 

[www.tngenweb.org](http://www.tngenweb.org).

After its original formation in 1842 was declared unconstitutional, Putnam County was firmly established 11 February 1854 when Richard Fielding Cooke's bill, with amendments, cleared the Tennessee House. Putnam County was again a reality. It is named in honor of General Israel Putnam, who rose to prominence in the American Revolutionary War and fought at the Battle of Bunker Hill in 1775.

Putnam County was first established on 2 February 1842 when the Twenty-fourth General Assembly enacted a measure creating Putnam County from portions of Jackson, Overton, Fentress, and White Counties. Isaac Buck, Burton Marchbanks, Henry L. McDaniel, Lawson Clark, Carr Terry, Richard F. Cooke, H. D. Marchbanks, Craven Maddox, and Elijah Con, all of Jackson County, were named by the Act to superintend the surveying of the new county.

Surveying was done by Mounce Gore (thanks to Nancy Hargesheimer for the correct spelling of his first name), also of Jackson County, and the Assembly instructed them to locate the county seat, to be called "Monticello," near the center of the county. However



Gen. Israel Putnam

contending that the formation of Putnam was illegal because it reduced their areas below constitutional limits, Overton and Jackson counties secured an injunction against its continued operation. Putnam officials failed to reply to the complaint, and in the March, 1845 term of the Chancery Court at Livingston, Chancellor Bromfield L. Ridley declared Putnam unconstitutionally established and therefore dissolved. The 1854 act reestablishing Putnam was passed after Representative Henderson M. Clements of Jackson County assured his colleagues that a new survey showed that there was sufficient area to form the county.

The act specified the "county town" be named "Cookeville" in honor of Richard F. Cooke, who served in the Tennessee Senate from 1851-1854, representing at various times Jackson, Fentress, Macon, Overton and White Counties. The act authorized Joshua R. Stone and Green Baker from White County, William Davis and Isaiah Warton from Overton County, John Brown and Austin Morgan from Jackson County, William B. Stokes and Bird S. Rhea from DeKalb County, and Benjamin A. Vaden and Nathan Ward from Smith County to study the Conner survey and select a spot, not more than two and one-half miles from the center of the county, for the courthouse. The first



County Court chose a hilly tract of land then owned by Charles Crook for the site. Prior to selection of the Court House site, Putnam County's first election was held 3 June 1854, at which time twenty-eight justices of the peace were elected, two from each of fourteen civil districts. Robert D. Allison was elected chairman of the County Court; W. Gentry as Trustee (treasurer); William Baker, Register (recorder of deeds); Joseph Pearson, Tax Collector; Pleasant Bohannon, Sheriff; Russel Moore, County Court Clerk; and Curtis Mills, Circuit Court Clerk.

This page was made possible by Charles Reeves, Jr. with considerable input from Billie R. McNamara, Fred Clark, and others as indicated in the references @ [www.tngenweb.org](http://www.tngenweb.org).

**Note:** Courthouses were built in Putnam County in 1856, 1866, and 1900. Courthouses were destroyed by fire in 1864 and 1898, and many records were lost in those fires.

There were fires at the Jackson County courthouse in 1872 and 1926, most early records were destroyed.

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