

PUTNAM COUNTY'S STANDING STONE MYSTERY DEFINED

By Op Walker

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'Cumberland Tales'

Part one – The Mystery Defined:

Late eighteenth and early nineteenth century travelers along the east-west road running across the land that became Putnam County were no doubt impressed with a strange monolith that stood near the Old Indian Trail. Located on the Woodcliff Road one mile west of the center of Town of Monterey stood a “dog-shaped” structure of an unknown origin and purpose.

The following documentations give creditability to the historical reports which have been handed down from generations to generation:

The area around the monolith became known as Standing Stone and later appeared in the Tennessee Gazetteers as Standing Stone, Tennessee. A copy of the earliest map (1790) showing the location of Standing Stone is printed in the historical document, “Cumberland County’s First One Hundred Years” by Helen Bullard and Joseph Marshall Krechniak.

An ancestral diary owned by a Cookeville native speaks of an incident where two travelers along the early Indian Trail “stopped to rest at the Standing Stone,” and were found in a state of hypothermia by a band of Chickamauga Indians. One of the travelers died and was buried by the Indians in a nearby cave. The cave is still visible under the fork of Highway 84 (leading from Monterey to Livingston) and Woodcliff Road. The other traveler was taken captive to their village near Chattanooga. This account is dated 1792.

The Carthage Gazette of 1811 speaks of travelers along the Walton Road chipping off pieces of the monolith as souvenirs. Concerns were expressed for the potential desecration of the structure.

Susan Goodwin (born 1810), a native of Standing Stone, Tennessee, remembered her uncle describing the Standing Stone’s appearance in 1825. Susan passed the story to her daughter, Fannie Goodwin Hall, who repeated the story to McClain, who printed the description in the History of Putnam County, 1925.

In 1979, Professor Harry Lane of Tennessee Tech University sketched a drawing of the Standing Stone Monolith as described by McClain in the 1925 History of Putnam County. The artwork produced by Professor Lane is now the “official” drawing of the Standing Stone Monolith as it may have appeared originally.

Although the original purpose of the monolith is unknown, history records an incident that occurred prior to the 1838 Removal of the Cherokee on the infamous Trail of Tears:

Cookeville Press, Cookeville, Tennessee, Thursday, September 30, 1887:

“Many, many great suns ago, the Cherokee and other powerful tribes of Red Men occupying these hunting grounds, because the decrease of game no longer afforded plentiful subsistence for the owners, petitioned the United States government to allow them to remove across the Mississippi to some vacant lands of the United States, and by treaty, finally adjusted and settled the cession of this territory to the Government (Treaty of 1805).

“The Great Chiefs of the various tribes called their people together and held a council on the trail from the “Hiawasse Country” to the great western district (West Tennessee) at a place for many great suns called by the palefaces’ “Standing Stone,” now Monterey, from Cookeville 18 miles toward the rising sun.

“Here for the last time in these hunting grounds, the great chiefs gathered around the burning council-fire, smoked the sacred calumet and listened to the words of wisdom from their venerable and beloved prophet,

who invoked upon his people the blessing of (the Great Spirit), that He might guide them to hunting grounds filled with game, and that they might be happy and contented in the land of the setting sun.

“They then made an excavation in the earth, by the side of the trail, and deposited the charred remains of the council-fire, arrows, beads, tomahawks and other trinkets, and (placing a stone over them, embedded the items into the earth).” (Writer’s Note: Accounts have been given of finding many of these buried items during the excavation and building of the railroad from Cookeville to Monterey).

Surveyors for the Nashville & Knoxville Railroad from Cookeville to Standing Stone, Tennessee, put the railroad bed directly through the monolith, thus requiring the destruction and subsequent removal of the ancient relic. In the early 1890s, the Standing Stone monolith ceased to exist except in pieces.

Several pieces were removed just across the road from the original site to the Standing Stone, Tennessee, Post Office, and were utilized for steps and a “horse-block” for to aid in mounting a horse or mule. The smaller of the larger fragments weighing 816 pounds (as determined by the Geology Department of Tennessee Tech) was later taken to by train down the mountain to Cookeville to be engraved by the Cookeville Marble & Granite Works, C. E. Wilson, Proprietor.

Part two will describe the preservation of the Standing Stone’s history.

PUTNAM COUNTY’S STANDING STONE MYSTERY

The Mystery Preserved

By Op Walker

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Part two – The Mystery Preserved:

For more than hundred years, the Standing Stone monolith was an icon located beside the Indian Trail west of Monterey. Revered by many who looked upon it, the monolith site became a geographical reference point for newspaper articles and United States topography maps.

The oldest known newspaper covering the Upper Cumberland area – still available for reading – is the Carthage Gazette. Copies dating back to the year 1808 are recorded on microfilm and contains incredible data from the distant past.

On Friday, June 1, 1810, the following article mentioning the Standing Stone appeared in the Carthage Gazette: “On Walton’s Road, near the Standing Stone, a pair of old saddlebags, three pair of overalls, one broad-cloth coat with some kain (sp) reeds rapt up in it (sic), two waistcoats, one pair of stockings, one pair of socks with eight dollars rapt (sic) in them, one bandanner (sic) handkerchief – the owner may have them by proving his property and paying charges.”

Another article from the same newspaper and the same date of publication as above mentions Standing Stone again: “Taken up by James Officer near Standing Stone, one bay horse colt about four years old, 13 hands high, appraised at \$10.

Although the Standing Stone was located on Walton Road some 50 miles east of Carthage, it is obvious that the Standing Stone monolith was so well known that any mention of the Standing Stone would leave no doubt as to the location of the subject matter.

Individuals began to settle that area of the state shortly after Tennessee became a state in 1796. The settlement, having a sizable radius emanating from the Standing Stone monolith, became known as Standing Stone, Tennessee. The name appears in several editions of the Tennessee Gazetteer. The center

of the settlement was the Standing Stone Post Office, which stood just across Walton Road from the original site of the monolith. An historical marker stands at the site today.

During the same period, Monterey, Tennessee, was a post village located in McNairy County, Tennessee. In 1893, a new town was surveyed at the eastern terminus of the Nashville and Knoxville Railroad and took the name of Monterey. Standing Stone, Tennessee, gradually adopted the name Monterey, which became official in 1901, while the Monterey in McNairy County faded into history.

A U. S. Geological Survey, dated November 1808, contains the Standing Stone quadrangle and is referenced as Standing Stone, Tennessee. The survey of 1808 shows the towns of Monterey and Standing Stone coexisting one mile apart.

Located on a major, highly traveled east-west road, the Standing Stone became victim to vandals and souvenir takers. Once described as a “dog in a sitting position, ears erect and facing west,” the proud Standing Stone Monolith was gradually reduced to a portion of its original height.

The final blow to the monolith came in the early years of the 1890s as the Nashville and Knoxville Railroad neared completion from Cookeville to the new town on the plateau known as Monterey (surveyed and named by Major Robert Moscrip who is buried in the Cookeville City Cemetery). In the fall of 2008, Dr. Calvin Dickenson, Tennessee Technological University professor emeritus, uncovered the only known photograph of the final destruction of the Standing Stone monolith as railroad workers were removing the fragmented stone portions from the surveyed railroad bed.

Realizing the historic significance of the Standing Stone, a Cookeville fraternity known as Narraganett Tribe #25 – I.O.R.M. (Improved Order of Redmen), procured the smaller of the town largest fragments from the fallen monolith and shipped the stone to Cookeville for the purpose of inscribing information on one face of the stone. Engraved on the stone were an eagle and a tomahawk with the secret word (TOTE) of the Red Man imprinted on the tomahawk blade. The Cherokee word NEE YAH KAH TEE (Standing Stone) was engraved on the stone as well. The date of the engraving by Cookeville Marble and Granite Works was placed upon the Standing Stone fragment. (Corn Moon, GSD 402 (the Red Men’s dating system meaning: September 1893))

The Standing Stone fragment, weighing some 816 pounds (as determined by Tennessee Tech’s department of geology) was taken to Cookeville by train car shortly after the completion of the railroad between Cookeville and Monterey. The engraved fragment was stored at Cookeville Marble and Granite Works until



October 1895 when a train (with a great ceremony) took the stone back to Monterey to be mounted on the pedestal where it remains to this day near the Monterey library.

(Pictured:

Cookeville members of the Order of the Red Men are pictured with the famous Standing Stone (sitting on top of the big rock) just prior to it being transported by rail to the pedestal in Monterey Park. Photo made late summer, 1895. (Op Walker Collection).

On Oct. 17, 1895, the Standing Stone monument was officially dedicated with a crowd estimated to be around 3,000 looking on. The monument stands 16 feet high, the height of the original monolith as recorded by early settlers.

For many years following the 1895 dedication, an annual pilgrimage to the Standing Stone monument was led by the Order of Red Men. However, the Great War (World War I) and the Great Depression of the 1920s and 1930s diverted the attention from the Standing Stone to the survival of the family structure.

Paramount in the decline in the annual pilgrimages to the Standing Stone was the passing of the generation that revered the symbol of the aborigines who once roamed this are of Tennessee.

In 1939, the historical significance flared up again with the State of Tennessee naming its new state park after the Standing Stone mystery. The park is located in Overton County, approximately 20 miles northwest of Monterey.

World War II and the lack of interest in the Standing Stone history gradually erased the Stone's significance from the minds of the local inhabitants. The monument in Monterey became a structure on the decline and out of mind, except for an occasional visit by young high school students looking for "some-where" to walk.

However, Nannie Buckner (Bohannon) Walker refused to let the history die. Her father was present at the 1895 dedication ceremony and she respected the older generation's heritage. During the 1940s and 1950s, Nannie walked her children over to the Standing Stone monument and related the story of the Stone to her eager children. (The author of this article is the youngest of the children who visited the Stone with our mother.)

Nannie passed away in 1971, and the history almost died with her. In 1975, this author began to research the history of the Stone and in 1979, invited the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma to return to one of their ancient worship sites. Cherokee Principal Chief Ross Swimmer and later Principal Chief Wilma Mankiller, visited Monterey several times to pay homage to the Standing Stone.

Standing at the monument on a snowy day in February of 1979, Monterey Mayor Ray Way signed a proclamation – written by attorney Dale Bohannon – declaring the second Thursday of each October to be "Standing Stone Day in Monterey, Tennessee, as long as the mountain shall be..."

Monterey has observed a Standing Stone holiday every year since, with the observance of the Standing Stone Celebration occurring during the second week of October. The event grows every year with more and more participation from local citizens as well as the arrival of hundreds of travelers aboard the special Excursion Express from Nashville.

Although the Standing Stone's original purpose will always remain a mystery, the monument stands today as the nation's only monument to the volunteer departure of the Eastern Cherokees westward – predating the infamous Trail of Tears of 1838 by more than a decade. (Cookeville Press, Cookeville, Tennessee, Thursday, September 30, 1897).

"Cumberland Tales," created by Calvin Dickinson and Michael Birdwell and sponsored by the Cookeville History Museum, welcomes any tale of this region's history. For more information, contact Dickinson at ckickinson@tntech.edu or Birdwell at birdie@tntech.edu.

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