

THE PEST HOUSE

By Charlie F. Hunter

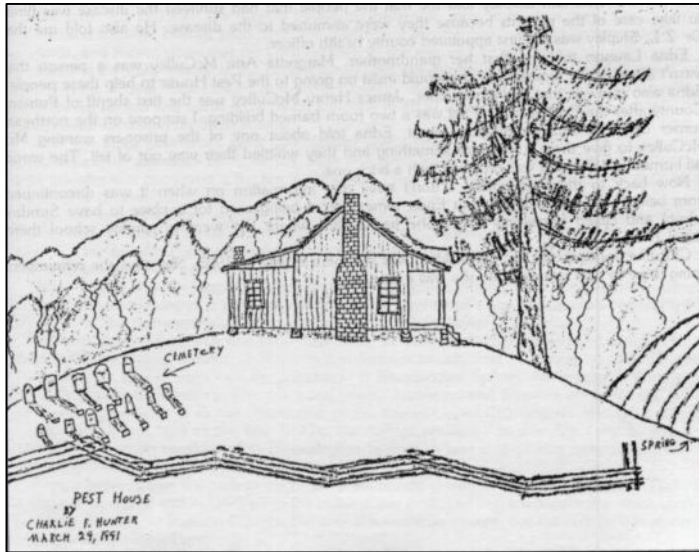
Siftings from Putnam County Tennessee

By Mary Hopson

Pgs. 9 & 10

The Pest House was a place where people were taken for quarantine when they had the smallpox.

On January 25, 1991 Paul McCulley went with me and showed me where the house was located. To get there from the Gainesboro Grade road, go north on Sherwood Lane to the end of the street which is 4/10 mile. Then, we walked through the woods down a small hill then up to the top of a small round hill which is about 400 yards. The house set on a practically flat place on top of the hill.



Paul McCulley and his sister Edna Lawson described the house to me and I was able to make a pencil drawing that they said looked like it.

The house was a three room boarded house with a fireplace and chimney at one end for heat. There was one large pine tree in front of the house. There was no plumbing or electricity. The house faced the southeast and about 100 yards down the hill in front of the house was the spring where they got water. Out at the back of the house

about a couple of 1—feet was a cemetery. If someone died, they just buried them in that cemetery.

The farm where the Pest House was located joined the McCulley farm where Paul and Edna was raised is why they remembered it so well. Paul thought the state had purchased the land for this purpose and after the Pest House was closed Tennessee Tech used the land to farm.

Smallpox had been a dreaded disease for many years, but a vaccine had been used successfully as early as 1721.

In October of 1900 two prisoners of the Putnam County Jail contacted what appeared to be smallpox. Dr. Jeff Dyer was county health officer at that time. At his request a physician from the state board of health came from Nashville and confirmed the diagnosis. Even though the jail was quarantined, eventually thirty-seven people contacted the disease. The board of health thought the danger was over, but in 1904 an epidemic struck again and twenty people contacted the smallpox.

With the cooperation of the county health department and the Oddfellows lodge, the Pest House was built and someone was hired to look after it. This was a primitive way of taking care of the problem. I understand if the person got well of the smallpox they were left badly scarred. Dr. Thurman Shipley told me that the people that had survived the disease were hired to take care of

the patients because they were immune to the disease. He also told me that Dr. Z. L. Shipley was the first appointed county health officer.

Edna Lawson told me that her grandmother, Margrette Ann McCulley was a person that wasn't afraid of the disease and she would insist on going to the Pest House to help these people. Edna also told that her grandfather, James Henry McCulley was the first sheriff of Putnam County after the Civil War. The jail was a two room framed building. I suppose on the northeast corner of Boyd and Washington Street. Edna told about one of the prisoners wanting Mr. McCulley to give them a knife for something and they whittled their way out of jail. The wood jail burned in 1894 and was replaced with a brick one.

Now back to the Pest House. I don't have any information on when it was discontinued from being used for smallpox, but Edna remembers it being used for a place to have Sunday school and called Lonesome Pine. She has a card where she went to Sunday school there dated 1915.

Christine Jones thinks the old building was still there as late as 1935. She says she remembers going there to pick berries when she was a girl.

Source: Putnam County Tennessee Cemeteries by Maurine Ensor Patton & Doris Gilbert Garrison, pg. 188:

COUNTY FARM (POORHOUSE) CEMETERY

Located on the late Major Shipley farm – now belongs to TTU, Putnam Co., TN. There is only one marker here:

Lou Ora French, b. 10 March 1899 – d. 22 May 1905

Thought to be buried here in unmarked graves: information from Charlie Hunter

John Childress (did farm work for Liza Pippin died 1930s)

Mary Spivey

Tom Odum

Tessie Lowhorn

Mr. Ward

Buried here and information taken from death certificates:

Lizzie Anderson: DC #359, Putnam Co., TN: d. 13 March 1916, age abt. 84 yrs. – parents unknown

George Jernigan: DC #396, Putnam Co., TN: d. 1 May 1916, age abt. 50 yrs. – parents unknown

Elizabeth Edmonds: DC #30, Putnam Co., TN: d. 14 February 1915, age abt. 84 yrs. – parents unknown

Unc Ferrell

Unknown b. -----

d. 1 Sep 1915

Age: abt 65y

Unknown

Unknown -----

County Farm Putnam

#168

Easter Jernigan

Unknown

b. -----

d. 28 Sep 1919

Age: 95y

Unknown

Unknown -----

County Farm Putnam

#472

Alf Johnson

Unknown

b. -----

d. 12 May 1929

Age: abt 78y

Unknown

Unknown -----

County Farm

White

#14332

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