

**COOKEVILLE UNDER ITS FIRST CHARTER;  
PUTNAM COUNTY DURING THE CIVIL WAR;  
THE BATTLE OF CALFKILLER**

**Early History of Putnam County, TN**

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Cookeville was first incorporated by an Act of the General Assembly of Tennessee, passed February 14, 1856, being Chapter of the Public Acts of 1855-56, which Act provided for the election of a Mayor and six Aldermen and authorized them to "sue and be sued, contract and be contracted with, hold real and personal property asses taxes to improve the streets and public squares, and pass all ordinances necessary for the benefit and good order of the town." Cookeville functioned as an incorporated town under said Act for over twenty-five years, when its citizens, after the enactment of the "Four Mile Law" procured the repeal of Cookeville's charter of incorporation in order to rid the town of saloons.

A highly interesting question is, what became of the records and Aldermanic minutes of Cookeville during the twenty-five year period of its first incorporation? No one seems to know what became of them, nor when how or why they were destroyed. Perhaps, after the first incorporation was abolished, some thoughtless person, though that those records were no longer of importance and destroyed them. If any person who reads this article knows of the existence of any of these early municipal records of Cookeville, or what became of them if they are not in existence, such person is urged to give the information to the Putnam Herald. In the absence of those records, we know very little about the proceedings of the Board of Mayor and Aldermen of Cookeville during the period from 1856 to 1881. Most of the available information now is to be had from the few living citizens who from memory can give us information and from copies of old newspapers published in Cookeville during that period. Major J. C. Freeze and Capt. H. H. Dillard were two Mayors before the Civil War. James M. Douglas, Houston S. Boyd and Capt. Walton Smith were three Mayors who served after the Civil War, but there were several others who also served after the Civil War. It is to be regretted that a complete list of Cookeville's Mayors, under the town's first incorporation is not available.

John W. Shores served for several years as Town Marshal of Cookeville after the Civil War. The tragic death of Ben B. Gabbert, while serving as Town Marshal, was, for many years, a theme of conversation in this county. During the County Fair, on October 4, 1878, Gabbert, a popular and worthy young man, while attempting to make an arrest, was shot and killed on a then vacant lot on the North side of the Public Square. His grave is in Cookeville Cemetery.

**Cookeville Hotels:**

Throughout the ninety-nine years of its history, Cookeville has been noted for its good hotels. Not that all of the hotel buildings were imposing structures nor equipped with every convenience, but they have always been well conducted and the public has liked to patronize them. Until in recent years, all of Cookeville's hotels were conducted on the American plan, furnishing meals as well as lodging, and excellent meals they were.

In 1855, James M. McKinney a prominent pioneer citizen of Putnam County and a member of the first County Court after the re-establishment of Putnam County, built the first hotel in Cookeville. It was a large two-story frame building situated on the South side of the Public Square, where the B-B Café and the small Chamber of Commerce building are now located. Mr. McKinney and his wife conducted this hotel, know as the McKinney Hotel, until several years after the Civil War. It was later conducted by several different persons. The late William J. Isbell conducted it for a good many years, when it was known as the "Isbell Hotel". Afterwards it was conducted at different times by Burr Cullom, A. L. Dale, L. J. Garner and others. It ceased to be a hotel about forty years ago and the hotel building was torn down and a business house was erected on the lot.

Shortly after the close of the Civil War, Mr. and Mrs. T. J. Shaw erected a hotel on the South side of the Public Square, on the lot where the Poteet & Maddux Hardware Company's store is now located. That hotel, known as the "Shaw Hotel", was conducted by Mr. and Mrs. Shaw until the building burned in the '80s.

A short time after the close of the civil War, Mr. Isaac Reagan built the hotel known as the "Regan Hotel" for many years, and later known as the Staley Hotel. The first hotel building was destroyed by fire, but it was re-built near the Southeast corner of the Public Square, and the building is still standing.

About 1894, the large tobacco factory building of Ford & Elston, located just South of the Public Square, on South Washington Street, was converted into a hotel building and Mr. A. A. Reagan conducted that hotel for many years. While Mr. Reagan conducted the hotel its name was the "Richelieu Hotel", at present, and for the past several years, it's name is the "Sidwell Hotel."

In 1890, upon the building of the Nashville and Knoxville Railroad to Cookeville, Mr. John G. Duke built a large hotel building near the depot. It was operated for several years by Mr. Duke, when it was known as the "Duke Hotel". Remodeled and enlarged, it is now the well known "Hotel Shanks."

Among the later hotels were the "Jared House" and the "Eureka Hotel", conducted, respectively, by B. B. Jared and W. V. Jenkins, and the well known "Arlington Hotel" which has been conducted for years by Mr. P. G. Cooper.

#### PUTNAM COUNTY IN THE CIVIL WAR:

Of course, it would require a good sized book to even briefly recount the history of Putnam County during the four years of the Civil War, and in this brief article only a few of the more important facts of that period can be referred to.

Putnam County voted over whelmingly for Secession. Practically the only Union adherents in this count were residents of the Southwestern section of the county and of a portion of the Western section of the county. The residents of other sections of the county were almost a unit in their espousal of the Confederate cause.

Putnam County furnished more Confederate soldiers than there were legal voters in the county in 1860, due to the fact that hundreds of young men from 17 to 21 years of age volunteered for service in the Confederate Army.

Practically all unmarried men of this county, of military age, volunteered for War service. Few of them waited to be conscripted.

After the first year of the War, so great was the need of soldiers in the Confederate service, that men of military age, although married and having dependent wives and several dependent young children, were conscripted into the confederate service.

In May 1861, Capt. H. H. Dillard, the first lawyer to locate in Cookeville upon the re-establishment of Putnam County, raised the first Company of Confederate soldiers to volunteer from Putnam County. This Company of Infantry was organized in May 1861 and was mustered into service on June 9, 1861. It was Company "K" of the 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, of which Regiment Col. John H. Savage, who had previously served four terms as Congressman from this, the 4<sup>th</sup>, Congressional District was elected Colonel and served with great bravery and distinction. When Capt. Dillard was promoted to the rank of Major, John Boyd Vance of Putnam County, was elected Captain of the Company. Capt. Vance met an heroic death in the Battle of Perryville, in which many soldiers of the Company were killed or wounded. One the night after that battle, in which Capt. John B. Vance was killed, and so many soldiers of the Company were wounded, the surviving soldiers of the Company elected Dr. F. M. Amonette, of Putnam County, as Captain to succeed Capt. Vance, and Dr. Amonette served as Captain of the Company during the remainder of the War. He was a near neighbor of Capt. Vance, both of whom were residents of the 11<sup>th</sup> District of this

County. Capt. John Boyd Vance was living with his uncle Jefferson W. Boyd in Rock Springs Valley and was principal of the Pleasant Grove School when the Civil War began and he immediately disbanded his school and entered the Confederate service in Capt. Dillard's Company. After the Civil War Dr. Amonette practiced his profession and engaged in farming until his death.

In the Company in which H. H. Dillard, John B. Vance and Dr. F. M. Amonette served as Captain, twenty-four soldiers of the Company were killed in battle, nine died of disease in the service and thirty-one others were seriously wounded in battle.

While Capt. Dillard's Company was the first Putnam County Company to enter the Confederate service, other Putnam County Companies were rapidly formed and mustered into the Confederate service.

Most of the Putnam County Confederate soldiers belonged to the Regiments of either Col. John H. Savage, Col. R. D. Allison, Col. S. S. Stanton, Col Joseph Shaw or Col (afterwards General) George G. Dibrell.

Colonels Allison and Shaw were residents of Putnam County when they entered the Confederate service. Col. Stanton was born and reared in Putnam County but when he entered the Confederate service he entered the Confederate service he was a resident of Carthage where he was an attorney of the Carthage Bar. Col. Dibrell was a resident of Sparta. Col. Savage was a resident of McMinnville. These five Confederate Colonels were greatly loved by their soldiers. Col. Shaw met an heroic death in the Battle of Savannah, Georgia. One of his sons, Sidney Station Shaw, age 95, is a well known resident of Cookeville. Col. Stanton was killed while leading his regiment in the Battle of Resacca, Georgia. He has numerous descendants living in Putnam County. The wives of Col. Shaw and Col. Stanton were sisters, One of the sisters was the wife of Capt. S. H. McDearman of this county. The three were sisters of the late J. C. "Jack" Apple, long County Judge of Smith County and a former State Senator. H. H. Dillard and Joseph C. Freeze were Majors in the Confederate Army.

The following Putnam Countians were Captains in the Confederate Army: H. H. Dillard, John Boyd Vance, Dr. F. M. Amonette, William B. Carlen, S. H. McDearman, J. H. Curtis, Walton Smith, Abraham Ford, William Ensor, J. K. Pippin, S. G. Slaughter, Rison Robinson, William P. Chapin, James Barnes, James P. Byrne, John S. Quarles and S. J. Johnson.

Among the numerous Putnam Countians who were First Lieutenants in the Confederate Army were Holland Denton, Henry P. Davis, Elijah W. Terry and C. J. Davis.

Only three Tennesseans were commissioned as Generals in the Federal Army during the Civil War and one of them was a Putnam Countian, Gen. Alvin C. Gillem, a West Point graduate.

Putnam Countians who serve as Captains in the Federal Army were P. Jones, Wade Jones, W. A. McCaleb and J. T. Exum. Capt. Fred Miller of New York, a Union officer, was stationed at Buffalo Valley when the Civil War closed. He liked to live in this county and he spent the balance of his life in either Buffalo Valley or Cookeville. He died and was buried in Cookeville.

No one could adequately portray the suffering, privation, grief and hardships which the women and children and aged men of Putnam County suffered during the Civil War. Hundreds of the county's splendid young and middle aged men were killed in battle or died of disease or exposure during the Civil War. Scores of others were murdered in the county. For four years there were no peace officers, courts or security. Lawlessness and crime prevailed. Regular armies and guerilla bands terrorized defenseless women, children and aged people and devoured their substance. There was not a community in Putnam County in which murders and assassinations did not occur. Robbery was the order of the day in every neighborhood when guerilla bands took every kind of property that they could carry away. Good citizens were murdered in their home, at church services, on church grounds and on the highways. The grief's and sorrows of the people of our county during the four years of the Civil War, if recorded in detail, would fill many volumes. As tragic as those years were, our young people should not be ignorant of the sufferings of their forebears and the memory of our heroic dead should ever be cherished.

## THE BATTLE OF CALFKILLER:

A pretended narrative of Putnam County's Civil War History which did not include an account of the Battle of Calf Killer would not merit much respect. The following is an accurate recital of the facts, well authenticated, without any intention of the writer to show prejudice or to discredit anyone.

Dug Hill, on the Calf Killer river, in the Fourth District of Putnam County, was the scene of the only battle of the Civil War fought in Putnam County. Some would say that the number of soldiers engaged in it was not sufficiently large to entitle it to the designation of a battle.

The Battle of the Calf Killer was really an ambush and a massacre. It occurred on February 22, 1864.

Gen. William B. Stokes, of the Fifth Tennessee Regiment of Federal Cavalry, was, at that time, stationed at Sparta. He was a resident of DeKalb County and in 1859 he was elected, as a Whig candidate. Representative in Congress from this, the Fourth, Congressional District. During the stirring campaigns of 1859 and early 1861 he professed to be a loyal Southerner and ardent Secessionist and made public speeches denouncing the Abolitionists, but he radically changed his attitude and became a bitter enemy of the Southern Confederacy and a rabid Union man. He secured a commission as a Federal officer, and because of this record he was thoroughly detested by the Confederate and Southern sympathizers of Tennessee and especially was this true in this Congressional District and section of the State. He was very bitter toward the Confederate officers, of Tennessee and especially soldiers and Southern sympathizers of the Fourth Congressional District, which District had elected him to Congress in 1859, when he claimed to be a loyal Southern man. Many of the leading Confederates of the District had supported him in his race for Congress in 1859, because they were Whigs and because he then claimed to be a true and loyal Southern man.

During the Civil War, Gen. Stokes greatly desired to effect the capture of such regular and sometime irregular Confederate officers of this section of the State as Capt. Champ Ferguson, Col. John M. Hughes, Capt. W. S. Bledsoe, Col. Hamilton and other so called Confederate families of this Upper Cumberland section had during the latter part of the Civil War. The homes of Gen. Stokes and Federal Captains Blackburn, Hathaway, and Garrison, three Federal officers whose War reputations yet linger in this section, were at or near Liberty, in DeKalb County, and Capt. Champ Ferguson and his sometime regular and sometimes guerilla soldiers, had made several inroads into the Liberty community and had made several unsuccessful attempts to capture these Federal officers when it was thought that they were at home. These personal grievances contributed to the burning desire of Gen. Stokes to capture Capt. Champ Ferguson and his men. Ferguson, a Fentress Countian, had then purchased a farm on the Calf Killer river, near the Putnam-White County line.

Gen Stokes raised the black flag and instructed his men that no quarter was to be shown or given to such Confederate officers as Ferguson, Hughes, Bledsoe, Hamilton and Gatewood, and their men, and on February 22, 1864, Stokes sent out a Company from his command at Sparta to capture the Confederate guerilla leaders and their men, whom he believed to be at that time in the strongly Confederate area of the upper Calf Killer river, with instructions to grant no quarter to those captured. The company sent on this mission by Gen. Stokes was commanded by Capt. E. W. Bass.

Col Hughes, and other Confederate guerilla leaders, in some way learned of Gen. Stokes' designs and they hurriedly formed a Company of about 100 Confederate soldiers, under Col. Hughes, and planned an ambush at Dug Hill, where the road wound around the mountain. The Confederates were hid in ambush on the wooded mountain side. When Capt. Bass's Federal Company, of about 125 men, reached the point in the road under the Confederate ambush, the Confederates, hidden behind trees and logs, on the mountain side, opened fire on the Federals, killing about 65 of them within a few moments. The remainder of Capt. Bass's Company fled in great confusion and a haste to their base at Sparta, it has been said without firing a gun. A gentleman of Sparta who saw the bodies of the dead Federal soldiers that were brought back to Sparta, started that 38 were shot through the head and that three had been killed with rocks.

A large number of those killed were residents of DeKalb County. Some of the killed were residents of Putnam County.

Unaware of the fatal reception that awaited them at Dug Hill, Capt. Bass's men had ridden into the jaws of death. The mountain side blazed. There was a deadly roaring volley, and the Federals instantly began falling from their horses. The scene must have been one never to be forgotten by either the Confederate or the surviving Federals. The quick, fast reports of rifles and pistols, the cries of the dying, the confusion of riderless horses, and the desperate flight of the surviving Federals must have been a weird scene challenging description'

The Confederate guerillas in this ambush were mostly men of Putnam and White Counties, but there were several soldiers of Fentress and Overton counties with them. No Confederate was injured in this battle.

Two DeKalb County brothers named Fuston and two brothers named Hendrixson of the same county, were among the Federals slain.

A prominent citizen of DeKalb County is authority for the statement, made 38 years ago, that one Federal soldier whose name was Russal Gan, fell wounded on the ground and pretended to be dead and afterwards hid in a hollow log and escaped in the night.

The France grave yard near the Putnam-White County line, which grave yard contains the grave of Capt. Champ Ferguson, is not very far from the scene of this battle.

Soon after the close of the Civil War, a post office was established on the Calf Killer river, in the Fourth District, and it was given the name of "Dug Hill". It served that section until Rural Mail Routes were established.

Correction: Last weeks article, as printed contained a printer's error, wherein the date of the fire which destroyed the second Putnam County Court House was printed "1898", but the manuscript was written stated the correct date "1899."

The Court-House burned in April 1899. A special term of the Quarterly County Court was immediately called, by County Judge J. W. Puckett, to take action with reference to the building of a new Court House. The Court convened in a building near the Northeast corner of the Public Square, in which building Prof. S. B. Yeargan's private school was being taught, a building afterwards owned by Mr. and Mrs. John L. Lee. The special term of the Quarterly County Court ordered the erection of a new Court House and elected a building committee to award the contract for its construction and to superintend the ejection of the building, which was completed in 1900. Then, as now, it is the largest and most beautiful County Court house between Nashville and Knoxville, and one of the best and most attractive county court-house in Tennessee.

\*Read more about the History of Putnam Co., TN at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>