

EARLY HISTORY OF PUTNAM COUNTY, TN

'Washington Academy in Court'

By Walter Steven McClain

<http://www.ajlambert.com>

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(In order to perpetuate such fragments of the early history of Putnam County as are obtainable, I have consented to conduct this department of The Herald. Any old papers submitted to me will be carefully preserved and promptly returned to the owner).

WASHINGTON ACADEMY IN COURT:

I have before me as I write, the original bill filed in the Chancery Court, at Cookeville, on February 2, 1867. It is addressed to Judge Andrew McClain, Chancellor, and is the complaint of J. M. Goodpasture, J. C. Freeze, B. D. Hunter, Curtis Mills and H. Denton, trustees of Washington Academy, and C. Mills, treasurer of Cookeville Masonic Lodge, No. 266, H. Denton, administrator of Joseph Pearson, deceased; Joseph C. Freeze, Pleasant Bohannon and James M. Douglass, all of Putnam County, and D. W. Hawes, of Jackson County. The defendants named were Margaret Rhodes, widow of S. S. Rhodes, of McMinn County, Tennessee, and several minor children; J. J. Henderson, of the State of Georgia; J. W. Crutcher, D. W. Hawes, Bird C. Kinslow, John G. Goodpasture, and (unnamed) Cooks, the latter of McMinn County, Tennessee.

The bill sets forth that on the blank day and month of the year 1860, the trustees of Washington Academy and the trustees of the Cookeville Masonic Lodge entered into a contract with one S. S. Rhodes, of McMinn County, Tenn., "to build and complete a house near the town of Cookeville, for an Academy building or house, two stories in height, the lower room for the use of said Academy, the upper room for the use of said lodge." The bill alleges that the said Rhodes failed to complete the building according to contract, "that he only built the wall of said house and covered the same, laid the upper floor thereof, and some other small portions of work about the building." It is further stated that Rhodes did, interstate, in the year 1862, "leaving but little property of any kind, except such as was included in a deed of trust to secure the payment of certain debts therein named to his creditors, your orators D. W. Hawes and J. M. Douglass, under the firm name of Hawes & Douglass; your orators J. C. Freeze and Pleasant Bohannon, under the firm name of Freeze & Bohannon; your orators H. Denton, for Joseph Pearson; J. W. Crutcher, J. L. H. Huddleston, D. W. Hawes, and others. Your orators state that W. J. Reagan, the trustee named in said trust deed, has also departed this life, not having executed said trust. They further state that the principal part of the personal effects named in said trust deed have been squandered and destroyed and, as they are informed, defendant J. J. Henderson took off from this county and has converted a portion thereof to his own use."

It is further charged in the bill that certain citizens had appropriated lumber and building materials to their own use, and one in particular had taken charge of a certain mule mentioned in the trust deed and had failed to make any arrangement for same. It is also charged that the former treasurer of Washington Academy had received a certain _____ from his predecessor, and a _____ amount from the treasurer of the State of Tennessee for the use of said Academy, no part of which had ever been appropriated by order of any Board of Trustees. However, it appears that the treasurer did make some advancements of money to Rhodes for use in purchasing materials, labor, etc., and for this he is called upon to make strict account.

The trustees of both the Academy and the Lodge agree to receive the building in its unfinished state at such a price as may be determined that it is reasonably worth.

The bill goes on to state that Rhodes purchased of defendant Cooke, who had purchased of his co-defendant B. C. Kinslow, a tract of land adjoining the lands of said Kinslow, on the waters of Blackburn's Fork of Roaring River, Putnam County, which land he (Rhodes) had traded to J. M. Goodpasture for a tract

of land lying in the district number one of said county, adjoining J. M. Goodpasture. It appears that no deeds of conveyance had been executed by any of the parties, but only bonds were given for title upon the payment of the purchase money. It was to determine just how much had been paid and what right or interest, if any, the said Rhodes had in this property that Cooke, Kinslow, Hawes, and Goodpasture were made defendants in this suit. The question of the widow's dower rights were discussed, concluding with this paragraph; "they further state that the only lands conveyed by said trust deed in which defendant Margaret E. Rhodes has right of dower is the tract named in said trust deed, of about – acres, lying on the west of Cookeville and adjoining said town. They further state that B. D. Hunter has the possession of said land and has had the occupation of it for several years."

The bill contains six closely written pages of large paper and discloses enough inefficiency, negligence and petty graft on the part of some of the "old timers" to cure any one of a longing for a return of the "good old days" when men were honest and interested in public affairs!

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