

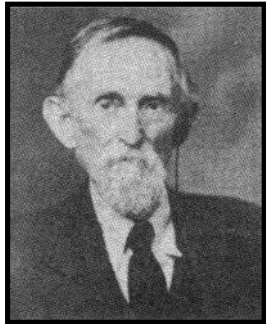
STORY OF A COUNTRY DOCTOR AND BANKER

by James L. Fletcher

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The article was taken from "The History of Tennessee and Tennesseans," by Will T. Hale & Dixon Merritt, Lewis Publishing Co., 1913.



Samuel Denton, M.D., for many years a prominent physician at Buffalo Valley in Putnam County, has attained to success in his profession after beginning life as a poor boy without special advantages in education and through the process of hard labor and self-sacrifice, finally equipped himself for the work upon which he had set his ambition.

Representing a family, which has been identified with Tennessee for a century, Samuel Denton was born in White County, February 22, 1854, the fourth in a family of five children, born to John S. and Matilda (Stephens) Denton. The paternal grandfather Elijah Denton, was a native of North Carolina, whence he came into Tennessee about one hundred years ago, settling in White County. He attained to the great age of eighty-eight years. John S. Denton, the father, was born in the State of Kentucky, in January 1809, and died in December, 1893. Educated in the county schools he took up life as a farmer and was also a schoolteacher. He married in 1853 and of the children the only two living are the doctor and his brother Elijah, the latter being a resident of Texas. Two of the sons, LaFayette and Elijah were Confederate soldiers in the Civil War. The father was a member of the Christian church and in politics was a Democrat.

Samuel Denton was reared in White County, and at Onward in that county obtained most of his education under Professor Billingsly, who was one of the most prominent teachers of his time in that section. He finally prepared himself for the practice of medicine and spent ten years in practice during which time he was also continuing his medical studies. In 1890 he received his medical degree from Vanderbilt University at Nashville, and then returned to Buffalo Valley where he has been in active practice for more than twenty years. Dr. Denton has a fine farm in Putnam County, and enjoys all the resources of a successful man. He is a member of the Putnam County, the Tennessee State, the Cumberland, and the Southern Medical Societies and the American Medical Association. He has served as president of the County Medical Society, and also was president of the Upper Cumberland Medical Society.



In 1901 Dr. Denton married Miss Minnie Jones, daughter of Wade Jones, who was a miller and merchant of Buffalo Valley. The doctor and his wife are members of the Christian church, and he has served as noble grand in the Odd Fellows Lodge and in politics is a Democrat.

Additional comments from a letter and from people who were personally acquainted with Doctor Samuel Denton.

Dr. Denton was humble average American man, reaching out to his fellow man, responding to their needs with understanding and providing help during sickness, poverty and death. He acknowledged that none of his ancestors were famous men, but over a period of 300 years some were preachers, schoolteachers, lawyers and doctors. Most were tradesmen, farmers and common people possessing common sense, honesty and strong and moral heritage.

Following is a quote from a portion of a letter from Dr. Denton to a cousin, dated march 6, 1930, in which Dr. Denton states, "My life has not been all one could wish ... I have seen much suffering and great sorrows. I have seen much of sin and evil doing, and the fruits thereof, and the ruin of dire poverty and ignorance. I have felt the finish of poverty and the winter blasts and summer's heat, and sleepless nights of anguish lest the mother might die tonight and leave a batch of orphans – or mother's darling might die and leave her broken hearted. My life has been full of interest in other people – I've thought little of myself – I've not been avaricious – my first thought is what I can do for him, not what I can get out of him, but there has been many joys in my life and I would not swap joys and sorrows with a king."

Dr. Denton had a good sense of humor, J. T. Askew of Silver Point spent a lot of time with Dr. Denton when he was growing up and listened to many of his stories. The one J. T. liked best was when he and his father went by the doctor's home on New Year's night to pay a doctor bill. Dr. Denton was sitting by the fireplace with a songbook singing hymns. His wife had gone to bed in the same room and had fallen asleep, but his singing woke her up from a dream. He asked her if she though she had gone to heaven and her reply was, "NO, I recognized your voice"! Dr. Denton gave a hearty laugh.

The Askew and Fletcher families and many others in the Buffalo Valley and Chestnut Mound areas called Dr. Denton or Dr. Gross when a family member was sick. The first one contacted was the one who came. I, James Fletcher, was 13 and thought I was sick enough to die. My mother called Dr. Denton. In less an hour his Model-A Ford came out the ridge where we lived. After a brief examination, he told my mother that I had yellow Jaundice; my eyeballs had already turned yellow. He gave neither prescriptions nor medicines but told my mother (didn't talk to me) to put me on a strict diet, no sugar, no grease, no meat and no corn bread. I was to have just two slices of white bread, toasted brown and soaked in sweet milk three times a day for a month. He then looked me straight in the face and said, "If you don't do this, you will die." This statement scared me stiff, and I'll never forget it. At the end of a month when I seemed to be well, it was hard for my mother to get me off the toast and milk. I don't know how they would treat jaundice (hepatitis) today, but I was cured, and I give Dr. Denton the credit.

In 1910 Dr. Denton became president of the Buffalo Valley Bank along with his partner, Mr. Jim Evans. Due to a decline in commerce in the area the bank failed, and, on April 6, 1926, the Buffalo Valley Bank closed its doors forever. The old bank building still stands. There were no federal agencies to cover deposits. Dr. Denton and Mr. Evans considered those deposits as their own obligation and their personal responsibility. Each depositor was paid in full from their funds. Dr. Denton traded or sold his car (Model -T Ford) to satisfy one of the depositors. Dr. Denton and Senator Jim Evans were honest and honorable men and their story of paying all depositors in full has been passed down through each generation.

Dr. Denton started his house calls on horseback, and as roads improved, graduated to his Model – T Ford. After his Mode – T was sold; he was back to square one. The community realized they were almost without a doctor since he had no transportation, so they made up money and bought the doctor a Model – A Ford. His wife, Minnie, did son of the driving for him. They story is told that he never quite mastered the gearshift and drove only in second gear. Most of the roads were narrow with little room to pass. It seemed he always speeded up when meeting another car. When asked why, his answer was, “I get by them quicker that way!”

Anyone who has ever written a story about Buffalo Valley always mentions the names of Dr. Denton and Senator Evans. These days it is hard to find men who conform to the professional standards of conduct as did these two men.

Dr. Samuel Denton’s old home in Buffalo Valley was torn down long ago and replaced with a brick house. Dr. Denton died in 1944, followed by wife Minnie in 1949. They are both buried in the Maddux Cemetery in Buffalo Valley. They had no children.

(The author thanks Mr. J.T. Askew, Silver Point, TN and Mrs. Katherine Dickens, Gordonsville Librarian, for their assistance).

- See Chapter 3 - Anna “Annie” Anderson for complete family listing.
- See Chapter 10 - Capt. William Wade Jones



Dr. Samuel and Minnie Jones Denton
By Doris "Dee" Bryant Wesser
<http://www.geocities.com/deewesser63/pagelists.html>

Samuel Denton was the son of John Denton and Matilda Stevens. He was born in White CO, TN 22 February 1854. He attended Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN. He moved to Buffalo Valley, Putnam CO, TN in 1877. He is listed on the 1880 Putnam CO, TN Census as age 26, Physician. His area consisted of Putnam, DeKalb, and Smith Counties in Tennessee. In later years he was also President of the Bank of Buffalo Valley. He married Minnie Belle Jones 14 March 1901 near Doyle in White CO, TN. Dr. Sam passed away of heart disease on 31 August 1944.

Minnie Belle Jones Denton was the daughter of Wade and Rebecca Bartlett Jones. She was born in Buffalo Valley, TN on 6 December 1875. Aunt Minnie became a help mate to Uncle Sam and for many years helped him on his medical rounds.

Samuel and Minnie never had any children but Aunt Minnie helped raise her niece Opal Rebecca Jones Bryant and became as close as a grandmother to several of Opal's children.

I remember so many good times at Aunt Minnie's home. One of her favorite songs was " Love Lifted Me" and she taught me to play it on her piano. Unfortunately I never got a piano so I no longer can play the song but I think of her every time I hear it.

Aunt Minnie died 25 Nov 1949 of gangrene that set in after she was severely burned. I remember her death well and I do not think I have ever recovered from her death even though I was a child of ten.

Source: Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN: Sunday Reader, Section B, 26 February 2006: Herald Citizen "Way Back When": Looking back in history, here were some of the happenings in the Cookeville area for the week of February 26 – March 4, 1932 as recorded in the pages of the Herald Citizen.

1932: Christine Sadler, daughter of Phillip Sadler of Silver Point, is a feature writer for the Nashville Banner. This week she wrote of Buffalo Valley's beloved country physician, Dr. Samuel Denton.

Born in White County in 1854, Denton began his medical practice at the age of 24 after studying for two years under another physician, Dr. Henry Smith. Formal schooling was not the rule in the days after the Civil War here. Denton later went to Vanderbilt University and received his medical degree in 1890.

Denton made house calls on horseback in a five-mile radius of his office in Buffalo Valley, but later bought a Ford auto and began covering 25 to 30 miles in a day. When the Depression hit and clients were unable to pay, Denton continued treating residents anyway.

Then his Model T broke down. To keep him going, the wealthier residents of Buffalo Valley pitched in and bought him another car.

Miss Sadler writes that Dr. Denton's practice is thriving still, despite the current "specialist mania" that is breaking out in today's medical world.

Maddux Cemetery, Putnam Co., TN
located east of Buffalo Valley on W. W. Shanks farm.

Samuel Denton M. D..
b. 22 February 1854, White Co., TN
d. 31 August 1944, Putnam Co., TN

Minnie (Jones) Denton
b. 6 December 1875, Buffalo Valley, Putnam Co., TN
d. 25 November 1949, Putnam Co., TN

A TRIBUTE TO DR. SAMUEL DENTON

Saturday, February 22nd is the 76th birthday of Dr. Samuel Denton, of Buffalo Valley. Few men arrive at the 76th milestone of life possessed of the mental, the physical and the spiritual activity with which Dr. Denton is possessed.

Coming to Buffalo Valley in 1881, he was one of the pioneer citizens, and has spent 49 years active in the practice of his profession in this locality.

In his unassuming manner he has gone to the poor and well off alike, with only a moderate recompense for his services.

Today Dr. Denton has the vigor of a man of younger years, driving his own car and going to calls where you cannot drive a car all the way, sometimes leaving his car and going part of the way horseback.

On Sunday morning when the duties of his profession do not call him elsewhere he is at his accustomed place at the church of his choice teaching and developing the spiritual side of life, without which a life is not complete.

When taking a retrospective view of life what a privilege to look back upon a life spent in alleviating pain, in relieving suffering and distress.

Great men by their inventions and discoveries have added untold wealth and fame to this nation but, they too, when disease overtakes them and their bodies are seized with pain and suffering call the family physician for aid.

It is fitting that we give recognition to those whose lives have been spent in the service of humanity.

Herald Newspaper, Cookeville, TN: 20 February 1930, front page.

WHEN BANKS PAID THEIR TABS

By J. B. Leftwich

When an old-time county bank failed, one banker even traded in his own Model T to cover deposits

I recently read that the Resolution Trust Corp., the federal agency dealing with multibillion dollar savings and loan fiasco, will cost taxpayers a few billion itself as it filters through the financial mess.

This brought to mind the Bank of Buffalo Valley, the smallest in which failed in 1926. Its failure cost the taxpayers nothing.

The Bank of Buffalo Valley was established in 1912 with a capital of \$5,100. The first officers were J. P. Nichols as president, W. W. Jared as vice president, and W. T. Travis as cashier. Jared and Nichols were successful traders and businessmen.

In 1919, Dr. Samuel Denton became president of the bank. Dr. Denton may have been the most respected citizen in the history of Buffalo Valley. He drove a Model T Ford, officiated at births and sat at bedsides during illnesses. He ushered my mother into this world in 1899 and, 20 years later, delivered me.

Dr. Denton's role in the story of the bank is highly significant.

Jim E. Evans was a prosperous and successful farmer at the time, operating a Smith County farm of several hundred acres which bordered the Caney Fork River. The tourist rest stop on Interstate 40 near the river and west of the Buffalo Valley exit is built on a site that once was a part of his farm.

At the time of the bank's birth, Buffalo Valley was a thriving farming and commercial town. There were as many as five general stores, a drugstore, two blacksmith shops, a gristmill, a tobacco warehouse, and a farm produce business.

Buffalo Valley was an important small station for Tennessee Central Railway. Large numbers of livestock were shipped from the stock pens which dominated

the village. Tennessee Central owned four houses near the station, homes of its railroad workers known then as “section hands.”

The role of the railroad was significant.

But travel and shipping by rail dwindled with construction of U. S. Highway 70 and the growing number of trucks and automobiles. At one time, the little town had its own Oldsmobile dealership.

With the growing number of road vehicles eroding the railroad’s business and decreasing trade at the general stores, commerce in the village declined, presaging the failure of the bank.

April 1, 1926, the Bank of Buffalo Valley closed its doors forever.

In contrast with what was to happen, let us move forward to the future and look at the failures in recent years of savings and loan institutions and a plethora of commercial banks, leaving this nation having to cover hundreds of billions of dollars in the accounts of insured depositors.

In 1926, there were no federal agencies to cover deposits. But the depositors lost not one penny. Jim Evans and Dr. Denton considered those deposits as their own personal responsibility, and each depositor was paid in full.

Dr. Denton even traded his car to Tom Amonett to satisfy the bank’s obligation to its depositor. According to retired banker John Henry Denny of Cookeville, who did the research for this column, Tom Amonett drove the car only once – into his garage and though the rear end. Later, the community made up money and bought the doctor a Model A Ford, but he never quite mastered the gear shift, and it is said he used only one forward gear.

The little bank building, until recently home of the Buffalo Valley post office, still stands – a monument to an age of personal responsibility and integrity.

Leftwich, of Lebanon, TN is a retired journalist and educator.

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PUTNAM COUNTY, TN - OBITUARIES - Deaths Reported in the Putnam County Herald 1906

<http://ftp.rootsweb.com/pub/usgenweb/tn/putnam/obits/pch1906.txt>

Deaths as reported in the Putnam County Herald Newspaper, TN
1906

Source: Cookeville, Putnam County Herald 1903-1907

Roll: #201

DENTON, MOTHER OF DR. SAM: Mrs. Denton, mother of Dr. Sam Denton of Buffalo Valley died last week at the advanced age of 94 years, and was buried in White county. [Date 2/21/1906 0:00:00, Vol. IV, No. 3, Page 1] Dr Samuel Denton was the s/o John S. Denton & Matilda Stevens.

**FUNERAL SERVICES TO BE HELD AT BUFFALO VALLEY, FRIDAY,
FOR DR. SAMUEL D. DENTON**

Funeral services will be held for Dr. S. D. Denton, tomorrow (Friday) at the Church of Christ in Buffalo Valley at 2 o'clock, with R. V. Cawthon, minister of the Church of Christ at Mr. Juliet in charge. Burial will be in the Maddux cemetery.

Survivors are his wife, Mrs. Minnie Jones Denton, of Buffalo Valley.

Dr. Denton died last night at his home in Buffalo Valley, of a heart attack.

He was born in White County, near Doyle, in January, 1854. He attended medical school at the old University of Nashville, and immediately after graduation from the medical college in 1877, he moved to Buffalo Valley, where he has engaged in the practice of his profession throughout the entire lower end of Putnam and parts of DeKalb and Smith Counties. Dr. Denton has served four generations in this section, where he was known and loved for his untold acts of mercy rendered during the 67 years he has worked and labored among his neighbors and friends.

Putnam County Herald Newspaper, Cookeville, TN: Thursday, 31 August 1944.

MRS. MINNIE DENTON DIES FRIDAY OF BURNS

Funeral services for Mrs. Minnie Denton, 73, who died Friday night at City Hospital of burns received in her home at Buffalo Valley on Wednesday morning, were held Saturday afternoon at Buffalo Valley Church of Christ, Rev. R. V. Cawthon officiated. Burial was in the Maddux Cemetery.

Widow of Dr. Sam Denton, Mrs. Denton was standing in front of her fireplace when the bathrobe she was wearing caught fire.

Daughter of the late Wade & Rebecca Bartlett Jones , she was a native Putnam Countian.

Survivors include 2 sisters, Mrs. Velma Newman, Nashville, Mrs. Nora Steele, Buffalo Valley & 1 brother, Henry Jones of Buffalo Valley, Putnam Co., TN.

Herald Newspaper, Cookeville, TN: Thursday, 1 December 1949, front page.

<http://www.ajlambert.com>