



LONG BRANCH COMMUNITY

by

Sam Denny

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Temperance Hall Remembers Book II

“A Brief History of Temperance Hall, Tennessee”

Compiled by Marjorie Hayes – January 1990

Pictured left is the family of Sam Denny.

L to R: L to R: Daughter Tina (Denny) Boring, wife, Hazel (Lambert) Denny,
Son, Ernest E. Denny, Sam Denny & son Steven Denny.

Compared to most DeKalb County communities Long Branch was late to get started. This in part, was because of the inaccessibility of the area and the “lay of the land.” For the most part, the community consisted of hills and hollows. Bounded by a ridge on the south and west and by the Caney Fork River on the north and east. Not that the early settlers were unaccustomed to dealing with such obstacles. Their thoughts must have been: Why take on an added burden when other areas were available? They realized all necessities from outside the community would have to be hauled across the ridge or across the river requiring much time and effort. Likewise, all saleable products would have to be moved over the same route.

The year of the communities beginning can be stated as about 1830. At this time, Bennett Braswell and Andrew Starnes were well established on their farms near the mouth of Long Branch and others were moving in. We know other people had lived here before Bennett and Andrew but they were more or less transients, such as, hunters, trappers, land speculators, etc. Bennett and Andrew were the first to build homes on the land they owned with the intentions of staying.

By 1850 the community had its own church, Hopewell Methodist Church, which held services in a log building erected for that purpose. This church was founded after several years of visiting preachers holding services in private homes. William A. Braswell, son of Bennett Braswell, was instrumental in founding this church. In 1902, a more modern frame building was erected and the name of the church was changed to Long Branch Methodist Church. The building erected in 1902 was destroyed by a tornado in 1956. A new building was erected and is still in use. The largest membership of the church occurred in 1915-20, 65 members. Currently, there are members. Several of these members live outside the community but attend the services regularly.

There was a Baptist Church in the community from about 1895 until 1924. It was known as Washer’s Chapel and was located on the ridge at the south end of the community. John A. Davenport, an elder of Indian Creek Baptist Church, was instrumental in organizing Washer’s Chapel. When the church house burned in 1924, it was not rebuilt. Apparently the members elected to go to other churches. We were unable to find an official record of this church, therefore, the names of pastors, number of members and such are unknown.

The first formal education in the community was started about 1850. This was a subscription school that held classes in the church house. Under the subscription school

system the community provided a building with sufficient benches. The teacher's salary (\$20 to \$30 per month) was shared by the parents, an equal amount for each student. books were bought by the parents and these books were traded from student to student as they progressed through the grades. Classes were held three months per year. Many families felt three years of classes were sufficient for their children, thus, many did not receive any formal education beyond this. By 1873, the school had its own building and the county furnished the teacher. At this time, a split 6-month-per-year schedule was started. In 1935, the continuous 8-month-per-year schedule was introduced and free text books were provided. This system continued until the school closed in 1952.

The largest enrollment was in 1912, the number of students was 63. There was several years when enrollment was 50 to 60, all being attended by one teacher. It is not surprising that most of the teachers remained only one or two years. Exceptions to this were Arthur Maynard (3 years), George M. Lamberson (6 years), and Opal Nixon Kyle (5 years).

The river which presented a barrier to land travel would later be a plus for the community as saleable products could be floated downstream to market and "boat stores" would come upstream bringing needed items.

Until 1900, much of the communities trade took place over the ridge at Temperance Hall. At this time, two things occurred that changed this routine. A road from the community, running along the river to Lancaster (approximately 4 miles) was opened and a mail route was established. This new road, much easier to travel than the ridge road allowed products to be hauled to the railroad at Lancaster. The mail route allowed easy shopping with the many mail order businesses of that time. Mail order catalogs were a tremendous aid to the women as they offered a much wider selection of items than the local stores carried and with trips to a major city almost nil, the opportunity to shop from one's home was a great advantage.

In order to retain a share of the communities business, some of the merchants at Temperance Hall sent out rolling stores (peddling wagons). These horse drawn, covered wagons made a trip into the community at least once a week. They carried items similar to what this "home" store carried and had provisions to receive farm produce such as chickens, eggs, hams, etc -as many of the people wished to pay for their goods with these items.

The community got its first store about 1905. At that time, Roscoe Judkins opened a small store near the south end of the community. This store stayed in business until about 1920. Shortly after World War I, J. T. Starnes opened a store that soon became a favorite trading and gathering place. This store remained in business for approximately 40 years.

Although the people desired to trade and associate with a much larger area, the remoteness and inaccessibility encouraged them to become a close-knit group working to become self-sufficient. In this endeavor, they were successful. In the community there were people skilled at making tools, clothing, shoes, quilts, bedding and other farm and

home necessities. There were carpenters, stone workers, butchers and shingle makers. By swapping these skills among themselves, they were able to provide the essentials for survival. Because of this they fared better than the general population during such times as the depression, following the Civil War and that of the late 20's.

If one family had a serious problem such as loss of a house or barn due to fire or the men of the family being sick during crop planting or harvesting time or the wife being unable to do housework, the neighbors would provide assistance. They would join together and complete such projects as building a house or barn, clearing and planting a field, cutting a winter supply of wood. In some cases, a teenage girl from one family would go live with another family in order to help during periods of serious illness.

One would think all this interrelated activity would have caused the people to be clannish and take a stand-off attitude toward outsiders but this was not the case. Outsiders were readily accepted and soon integrated into the community. They had to only meet one requirement, be able and willing to contribute something to the well being of the community. No one would tolerate a dead beat.

There was a slow but steady increase to the communities population until 1910. At this time, there were 62 families, all making a living from farming or timber products. With this number of people "living off the land" the soil began to be depleted. Products from the woodland were not so plentiful, so the economics of the situation dictated that the population decrease. There was a slow decline in population until 1940, at which time there was approximately 30 families.

In 1940, a sudden and drastic change came about that altered the communities character forever. This was the year construction of the Center Hill Dam started. If the Long Branch community had one unique quality, it was the ability to adjust to this sudden change. The people soon joined the flow of things instead of fighting it. As a result, most of the people benefited from the project. Make no mistake, a few families had to make a great sacrifice. They had to pull up roots from homes and farms that had been in their family for many generations and no amount of compensation could make up for this. However, from the overall viewpoint, the community benefited from the project and the related improvements that came with it.

Another change took place during the 40's that altered the communities population. That was the involvement of this country in World War II. Many of the young men went into military service, many families moved away to work at defense jobs. After the shuffle of people caused by the dam building and the war, there was less than a dozen community families engaged in farming.

Presently, there is very little farming activity. Many of the residents are retired, others live in the community but earn their living elsewhere.

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Services for Mr. Denny will be 1 pm Tuesday, January 27, 2004 at DeKalb Funeral Home with Larry Self officiating. Interment will be in the Rose Chapel Cemetery in Sparta, TN. Visitation will be from 10 AM until the service Tuesday at the funeral home in Smithville.

Mr. Denny, 76, of the Long Branch community, died Saturday, January 24, 2004 at his home. He was a field engineer with Union Carbide before retiring in 1985. He was also a licensed surveyor for DeKalb and Loudon Counties. He authored the History of Long Branch Community, which recounts the history of Long Branch from the early settlement days until the Cordell Hull Dam was built. He also wrote several articles for the Middle Tennessee Times.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Hazel Elaine Lambert Denny. Survivors include: his four children, James Steven (Sandra) Denny of Greenback, Tina Ann (Bob) Boring of Greer, S. C., Ernest Denny of Land of Lakes, FL, and Elizabeth Gay Denny of Long Branch; five grandchildren, Stephanie (Rocky) Wind, Jimmy, DeAnna, Haley and Samantha Denny; three great grandchildren; two brothers, Larry Self of Cookeville and Jimmy Self of McMinnville; and sister, Frances Irene Bain of Short Mountain.

