

THOMPSON LUTHER (T.L.) DENNY

Son Husband Father Grandfather Teacher Lawyer Judge and Mayor

T. L. b.26 August 1851, the first child of Jonathan and Agnes Winfree Denny early pioneers of Putnam County who were unassuming farming people content with rural life.

Unlike his parents, T. L. would leave rural life for one of community service.

Jonathan Denny and Charles Randolph Ford, (the fathers of T. L. Denny and Frances "Fannie" Ford) attended the free school at Rocky Springs in the fall session of 1859, where John Jared taught geography, reading, writing, arithmetic, English, and grammar. The 1860 census indicates T.L and Fannie, ages 9 and 6, had been in school that year, therefore, it is possible they were attending school with as their fathers.

The 1870 census indicates the children continued their education. Perhaps they attended the old Pleasant Grove Church as school was taught there from pioneer times until many years after the Civil War and the Denny name was in its annuals.

By January 1, 1874, T.L. and Fannie had received (teacher) certificates of qualification.

Their grades were 8 ½ and 8 ¾, Fannie doing just a bit better than T. L.

T. L. was the first to teach at Denny Seminary; first school in the west end section of Putnam County (near Buffalo Valley), built by Silas, younger brother of T. L.

Their uncle Timothy Denny donated the land, material and money for the school.

T. L. m. 1 December 1878 Frances "Fannie" Ford, (daughter of Charles Randolph and Henrietta Draper Ford). T.L. was practicing law in Cookeville when their first child Minnie Bell was b. 2 June 1879. How he was admitted to the Cookeville bar is not known; did he attend Cumberland University, study under the very prominent Cookeville attorney Holland Denton, or was he granted admission by Judge Morgan, as was done in those days? T. L. and family were living in Cookeville at 74 Spring when daughter Marguerite "Maggie" Black was b. 28 November 1881. In 1882 his law office was located on Jefferson Street, across from the court house and between Broad and Spring.

The family continued to grow and Leslie Luther was b. 10 September 1884.

T.L had several law partners: among them were W. G. Currie, a Mr. Douglas and Oscar King Holliday. However, reaching beyond his law practice and continuing his dedication to education, in 1885 T.L. was elected Superintendent of Public Instruction for Putnam County. Additions to the family continued with Cora Agnes b. 3 September 1887 and Clara Lucy b. 28 December 1889. While his primary profession was law, in 1890 he and Silas had a furniture and carpentry business near Buffalo Valley. Then in 1891, the Tennessee Legislature created the office of County Judge of Putnam County, and T. L. was appointed to that office. Assuming his new position he wasted no time. Determined to improve conditions and put the County Asylum and Poor House on a self-sustaining basis the County Court voted to purchase a large productive farm and move the facility. T.L. was so involved it was not uncommon for him to serve as guardian for a resident of the facility.

T.L and Fannie's last child Theophilis Larrimore was b.17 June 1893, and barely a year later T. L.'s mother Agnes d.18 June1894. It seemed the whipsaw course of joy and grief was set. The children grew, went to school, were socially active and began to marry; Minnie Bell m. 29 August 1900 Hasker Michael Jared, Leslie m.17 September 1901 Nallie Naoma Trousdale. However, joy was interrupted when Jonathan, with T. L. at this side, d. 10 April 1902. Life went on. Maggie m. 17 September 1902 Oscar King Holliday and on 22 October 1902 T.L. laid the foundation for a large two story house on the Gainesboro Rd. The new year was eventful and most difficult, their first grandchild, Rupert Lee b. 1 April 1903, and Fannie's father Charles Randolph d. 18 June 1903. They were devastated on 13 December 1903, when they learned their oldest son Leslie, barely nineteen, the father of Rupert, while cleaning his pistol had accidentally shot and killed himself. Lifting them from the abyss of sorrow was the

birth of their granddaughters Mabel Jane Holladay b. 24 December 1903, and Ellen Frances Jared b 12 November 1904.

T.L. had a large law practice, and continued to serve as county judge. His competence did not go unnoticed and in January 1905 Governor Frazier appointed him Special Chancellor over Chancery Court of Cannon County.

T.L. and Fannie welcomed a grandson John Denny Holladay b. 7 January 1906.

In mid March of 1906 Judge Denny presided over the Jackson County Court case, State vs. Eliza Ray, a much publicized murder trial. Not absolutely and positively convinced of Mrs. Ray's guilt he set aside the jury verdict of murder in the 2nd degree and ten years in prison, and sustained the motion for a new trial. At the second trial Mrs. Ray was convicted of voluntary manslaughter and given a lesser sentence of five years in prison. The year 1907 saw; T. L. carry every voting ward of Cookeville and be elected Mayor on 26 April; daughter Cora Agnes married 28 August William McCluen; the birth of granddaughters Nan Holladay 4 September and Henrietta Pauline Jared 18 November rounded out the year.

The 1908 year was very unkind claiming Fannie's mother, Henrietta Draper Ford d. 2 February, and Frances Jane Ford Denny, herself on 12 September 1908.

Unable or unwilling to live alone, T. L. married Lillie Robertson sometime in mid 1909. His new wife and her daughter moved into the Denny home at 522 Broad Street. This caused great dissention between T. L. and youngest daughter Clara. Clara went to live with sister and brother-in-law Maggie and O K Holladay, and remained estranged from her father.

In July 1910 T.L. was involved in a very high profile case. While presiding as Special Judge over Criminal Court at Lafayette, Macon County, he granted a petition for change of venue to Smith County for one of the most notable criminal cases at the time, the

Albert Dean Case. Mr. Dean was charged with killing Dr. W. E. King. When the case went to trial in late April 1911, notable attorneys from four counties represented Mr. Dean, including Oscar King Holliday of Cookeville.

And then:

“SUDDEN SUMMONS FOR JUDGE DENNY; City Attorney of Cookeville and Prominent Citizen is Dead, Special to the Nashville Banner, September 13, 1911. Judge T. L. Denny, one of the most prominent lawyers in this section of the state died suddenly of heart failure at 9 o'clock last night at his home in this city. His death came as a great shock to everyone. He was 60 years old and is survived by his wife and five children by his first marriage, Mrs. H. M. Jared, Mrs. O. K. Holladay, Miss Clara Denny, Larimore Denny of this city and Mrs. Will McCluen of Monterey. Judge Denny had held the office of County Superintendent of Public Instruction and County Judge of this County and Mayor of this city and at the time of his death was City Attorney. He had frequently served as special Circuit Judge and Criminal Judge and had practiced his profession in all courts of this and adjoining counties. He was a member of the Christian Church and a Mason was highly esteemed by all. His first wife, who before their marriage was Miss Frances Ford of this city, died several years ago and he married a second time to Mrs. Robertson of Mount Juliet, who survives him.”

He was buried in the Cookeville City Cemetery next to his beloved Fannie and their son Leslie. He did not live to hold grandson William “Billy” McCluen b 18 August 1917; to welcome Larimore home from WWI, be present when Larimore married Ollie May Davis 09 December 1920, or to hold grandchildren Larimore Jr. b 1 August 1921 and Mary Frances b 6 June 1924; rather the energetic, intelligent, public servant had gone to a higher heavenly court.

While T.L. was a very prominent citizen and public servant, he must have retained the unpretentious, unassuming, calm and gentle ways of his parents, for his accomplishments are barely recorded and evade casual research.

Submitted by: Jean A. Hudson



Denny children

Leslie (center) clockwise Maggie, Clara, Cora, Larimore, Minnie ca. 1900



Larimore (center) clockwise Clara, Maggie, Minnie, Cora



T.L. Denny Home 522 Board



Great granddaughters of T.L. Denny
Sitting on porch at 522 Board
L to R: Mary Davis, Nancy Jane Childress,
Martha Buttrey Lewis, Janey Bassett,
In back, Jean Hudson related to Mary and
Martha.

SOURCE

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INDEX
T.L. Denny article

Bassett, Janey
Childress, Nancy Jane
Currie, W. G.
Davis, Mary Denny
Davis, Ollie May
Dean, Albert
Denny, Agnes Winfree
Denny, Cora Agnes
Denny, Clara Lucy
Denny, Frances Jane Ford 'Fannie'
Denny, Jonathan
Denny, Leslie Luther
Denny, Marguerite Black 'Maggie'
Denny, Mary Frances
Denny, Minnie Bell
Denny, Rupert
Denny, Silas
Denny, Theopholis Larimore Sr.
Denny, Theopholis Larimore Jr.
Denny, Thompson Luther 'T.L.'
Denny, Timothy
Denton, Holland
Douglas, Mr.
Holliday, John Denny
Holliday, Oscar King
Holliday, Mabel Jane
Holliday, Nan
Hudson, Jean A.
Ford, Charles Randolph
Ford, Henrietta Draper
Frazier, Govenor
Jared, Ellen Frances
Jared, Henrietta Pauline
Jared, Hasker Michael
Jared, John
King, Dr. W. E.
Lewis, Martha Denny Buttrey
McCluen, William
McCluen, William 'Billy'
Morgan, Judge
Ray, Eliza
Robertson Lillie
Trousdale, Nallie Naoma