

Letter From: James "Pete" Nichols: 6 February 2004
To: Audrey June (Denny) Lambert
Memories of Buffalo Valley, Putnam Co., Tennessee

Dear Audrey June,



Thanks for all of the Nichols History and pictures. I know so much about Buffalo Valley and Indian Creek that I could write a book on it. There were so many happenings because there were people living in every hollow, low gap and hill side.

Mr. Walter Shanks store on Indian Creek, Will Christian's blacksmith shop and Jess Gamble ran the grist mill. I guess there were 10 or 12 families that lived up Dry Hollow from the store. We played

horseshoes, pitched baseball and told a lot of tales. I sold Mr. Walter, walnuts, corn and fur hides. He had for a dime – you could buy a cold drink, ½" by 5" piece of baloney and crackers plus the hot sauce was free. There would be a lot of people there especially on Saturday. Elections were held there, that drew a big crowd. Also where yellow sucker fish were spawning those creek banks were lined from Buffalo Valley to Peter's Cave.

Now on down the creek was Doll Maxwell's store, shoe & barber shop and a settlement called "The Philippine Islands" where about 20 families lived. There were 2 blacksmith shops and a produce house there also. This was the north side of town. The south side or Buffalo Valley consisted of a produce house, Z.A. Medley & Son, T. D. Alcorn general stores, Mr. Worth Saunders had a drug store and general store, barber shop in the basement. Eukeley Carr ran a grist mill, Will Christian had a black smith shop there.

The Tennessee Central Railroad was booming then. There was a depot and 5 or 6 homes for the section gang for the railroad, also at one time a tobacco warehouse and a stockpen. Box car loads of chickens, eggs, cattle, hogs, sheep, lumber, logs etc....were shipped out. They had mule days and people would come from all over to buy and trade mules.

Buffalo Valley in the 20's, 30's, & 40's was a booming little town. It was said at one time more stuff was shipped from Buffalo Valley than Nashville. Mr. Medley had a thing going then when you bought 50 cents worth of goods, he would give you a ticket – you would keep have the ticket and put half the ticket in a tub, every month or two they would have a drawing and give away a nice prize. The drawing was usually held on Saturday afternoon in front of the store porch with 200 or more people in attendance. The county was alive - - then WWII broke out and people went north. I wrote a poem about this, I'll enclose a copy.

Back Home

By James "Pete" Nichols – 16 July 1986

I've traveled this little valley over from the Tucker Ridge
Down the old railroad tracks to the Caney Fork Bridge
I've heard the old Wildcat whistle scream
As that engine approached that stream

I've seen the back water rise
And the rain fall hard from the skies
Caught a few hog suckers from Indian Creek
Saw a few people from the Philippines weep

Heard Aggie Medley prophecy
And watched cars and trucks on I-40 go by
Road a few horses and mules
And remember hard labor with crude tools

Saw little babies nursing their mother's breast
They were the healthiest kids in all the U.S.
Watched the maneuvers getting ready for war
No one was left out, not the rich or the poor

People left little towns and went North
Uncle Sam had called all the people to come fourth
When all the dust had settled and as year passed by
I wondered where the people went and wanted to cry

Times have gotten better and the competition keen
That's why no one in good ole Buffalo Valley can be seen
You don't see any crowds around the store
This is a thing of the past and will be no more

It's sad for the old timers as they drive by
But maybe we will all meet again somewhere in the sky
No more sorrows, fall-out or acid rain
We will all join hands and sing and have no pain

Before Center Hill Dam was built, Buffalo Valley would flood. Unbelievable how much water would be over Buffalo Valley. When it went down, people had a huge clean up job to do. Sometimes the railroad company would bring cars in for people to live in a few days.

At one time there was an Oldsmobile dealership there plus caskets were made upstairs in the T. D. Alcorn store then owned by Charlie & Fred Maddux and Walter Shanks. In later years there was a shoe repair shop and pharmacy plus hair cuts on Saturday.

The post office was building was used by the Democrats and moved to Mr. Medley's when the Republicans were in office. This was an interesting situation, but everyone stayed friends.

A big fire in about the early 30's really set Buffalo Valley back. They never rebuilt the tobacco warehouse or stock pen, but Mr. Medley & son built back a larger and better store. They handled everything from pocket knives to chicken feeders to farm stuff to clothes, furniture, cold drinks and chewing tobacco.

There was a prophesier by the name of George "Aggie" Medley that predicted that some day a super highway would come through Buffalo Valley - - weeds would grow up in the towns, stores and businesses would close, this has happened.

A lot of fine people lived in that area but as farming slowed and WWII broke out, people left and never returned; but there was always a soft spot in our hearts for Buffalo Valley and the good times we had there.

I'm skipping around - - there was also a depot there plus a huge water tank where train engines took on water pumped from Indian Creek by a man named, Jess Gamble. Jess also kept all the engines running for the grist mills.

Big 4th of July picnics were held on Caney Fork River under the Carlen bluff and spring. Probably 200 or so people would attend. County bands would play music, hot dogs, hamburgers, ice cream and lemonade was served. Some times some would get a little too much moon shine and fights would break out. This was rare - - constables were always on hand to take care of any trouble. Everyone had a great time usually.

Famous names of places around there were: Phillipine Islands, Caney Fork, Hurricane Hollow, Happy Hollow, Rock Springs Valley, Indian Creek, Birch Knob, Ruttin Ridge and Keg Spring.

Carolyn & Ted Huddleston are great community workers and they are trying to raise money for some needed work on the old Buffalo Valley schoolhouse and will try to get it listed as a Historical Community Center. I have written lots of people for donations.

Back to Indian Creek - - going from Mr. Shanks store toward Virgil Timothy Denny's home - - just across the bridge where the road forks there was a house on the left side of the road, Harold Denny lived there, about a 100 yards on up that road going toward the Timothy Denny farm, later owned by Minnie Denny his daughter was a Methodist Church built on the right side of the road. The land for the church was donated by Mr. Virgil Timothy Denny. He was care taker, built fires in winter and others pitched in if work needed to be done. They raised money by selling names on quilt pieces. My wife,

Imogene Carr Buckner Nichols quilted this quilt and I have it now. On around the curve from the church was Denny's Seminary Schoolhouse. A large one room schoolhouse where primer thru 8th grade was taught. My Aunt Douglas Nichols taught there for years. There are two people living in Redford Twp., MI from Buffalo Valley that you might call and get a little Buffalo Valley information. He is Eugene Maxwell and she was Theoplis Helms. She lived in the Philippines. She is about 79 and he is 80 also Scott Bucker. Scott lived on the head of Indian Creek. Now the person that knows the most history of Buffalo Valley and Silver Point is J.T. Askew. He lives in Silver Point, Putnam Co., TN. He will answer any questions you have he has a great memory. He will talk as long as you want to talk.

I'll get Dillon & Jigg Wallace information next time I talk to Dillon. He and I were best of friends. We went to Baxter Seminary together. I'll write some on Dear Old Baxter Seminary next time.

Love to all Pete Nichols of 1621 Cobber Dr., Lutz, FL 33559

Tennessee – Thinking
By James "Pete" Nichols
March 1986

I was sitting on the Birch Knob waiting for the winter thaw
I looked down on this valley and saw the prettiest sight I ever saw
The sun was shining on the cedar trees with all that snow
It was really beautiful with a heavenly glow

The roads and paths were all empty as the sun shined
I wondered where the people were and it made me feel like I was blind
Where were all the Medley's, Maddux's, Russell's and old J. T. Askew
Just to name a very special chosen few

I heard this wild cat whistle scream across the river bend
It sounded like the Southern crossing the L&N
It was the ole Tennessee Central hitting the river bridge
In plain view as I sat there on that ridge

I had a special feeling run across my mind
As that train came to a halt with a grind
I figured it all out without a doubt
The people couldn't buy a nickels worth of bacon or a dimes worth of lard
They left because the times were so hard

Sometimes I feel like laughing
Sometimes I feel like crying
Then I think in another few years we will all be dying
So why worry about the past

When you come right down to it, you know those good ole times can't last

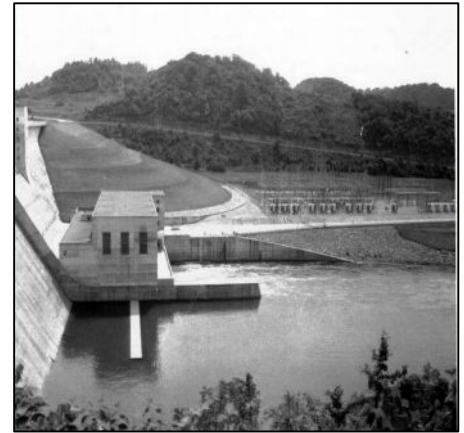
Putnam County, Tennessee, 1850 – 1970

By Mary Jean DeLozier

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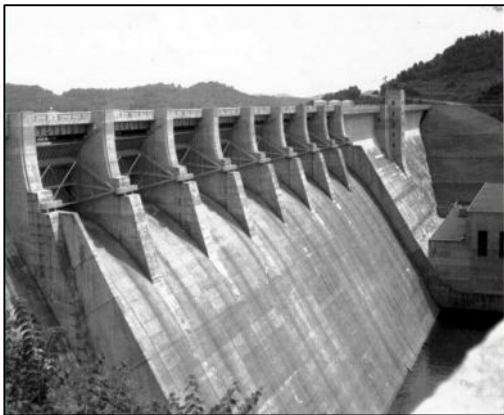
No one carried insurance to cover natural disasters such as floods and storms. Before the 1930's and the days of extensive national funding for flood control, high waters were an annual problem in Buffalo Valley. In April of 1902 hard rains caused the Caney Fork to overflow. Torrents swept away the railroad bridge there, floated the mill downstream (destroying on thousand bushels of grain), and washed the post office off its foundation, soaking all the stamps and mail. In addition, hail, windstorms, and tornadoes ruined farm property and crops. Coverage in Putnam County for such disasters was far in the future.

Photograph courtesy of Ralph H. Wirt.



Center Hill Dam
Pictures taken by Tim Denny

Center Hill Dam, Putnam Co., TN Story: <http://www.smokindragon.net/centerhilldam.html>



Center Hill Lake is located in the Cumberland River Basin, on Caney Fork River, and covers parts of DeKalb, Putnam, White, and Warren Counties in Tennessee. It controls the runoff from a drainage area of 2,174 square miles. The dam was completed for effective flood control operation in 1948. The 250-foot high dam is a combination concrete and earth structure with a gate spillway. Each of its eight gates is 50 feet wide. A permanent pool is provided at elevation 618 feet above mean sea level, and has a water surface of 14,590 acres. From that level to elevation 648, corresponding to the crest of the spillway, a capacity of 492,000 acre-feet is reserved for the generation of hydroelectric power. Except in periods of unusual drawdown, the pool is held

in the vicinity of the spillway crest where it covers an area of 18,220 acres and extends approximately 64 miles upstream. From the spillway crest to the top of the gates, a storage capacity of 762,000 acre-feet is normally held empty for the temporary retention of flood flows. At the top of the gates, elevation 685, the

reservoir covers an area of about 23,000 acres and contains a total of more than two million acre-feet of storage. The lake has 342 miles of shoreline at the power pool stage.

GET JOB REVIVING BUFFALO VALLEY

Letter to the Editor, Herald Citizen Newspaper, Tuesday, 10 August 2004 – Opinion: Page 4

I want to personally thank and commend the Herald-Citizen for the write ups and exposure that you have given the Buffalo Valley School and Library. You have done a great job.

I am a native of Buffalo Valley and I really love what Carolyn Huddleston and the two other ladies have done. More local residents need to participate more in order to get Buffalo Valley back on the map.

Working together as a community can accomplish a world of things.

I have been gone from Tennessee for 52 years but I always come back for visits and I will be buried in those hills because I love them and the great people. To me, that is 'God's Country.' PETER "PETE" NICHOLS, Lutz, FL.

Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, Putnam Co., TN

(12 August 1943) There'll be no squirrel season here this year, the newspaper announces. Authorities don't want hunters loose in the woods firing weapons as the US Army maneuvers in Middle Tennessee. Squirrel hunting has been banned in Putnam and 25 other Middle Tennessee counties.

(1 January 1944) Hundreds of GI's training in Middle Tennessee with the Second Army's maneuvers are in Cookeville this week because they didn't receive furloughs to go home for Christmas.

(14 March 1944) The historic – and massive – Tennessee war maneuvers are over. Troops that trained here are en route to Europe in the buildup before D-Day.

(13 December 1944) The American Legion has unveiled plans for a building to memorialize Putnam's war dead and to house veterans' service offices as well. A fund drive for the building will get under way shortly. The building will likely be placed on Spring Street, Cookeville, TN.

CELEBRATING A HUNDRED YEARS Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN 11 February 2003

Retired TTU English professor Eleanor Mitchell agreed and remembers riding the train to Nashville when she went away to college at David Lipscomb University. She took the train because it easily accommodated all her belongings.

"I remember the straight, hard seats were very firm and very dirty," she said. Coal soot was pervasive.

In summer, "It was hot inside and you'd want to sit by a window, of course, but that was dangerous. You might get a cinder in your eye."

Memories of trains and the war years are especially vivid here still. They were dramatic years of high emotions. Trains were packed with young soldiers rolling into the unknown, mingling with regular riders.

Eleanor Mitchell remembers special troop trains moving through and "all the young men would hang out the windows waving at us."

She said, “It was a very special time,” particularly during the Tennessee Maneuvers when the US Second Army conducted war games back and forth across Middle Tennessee and on many weekends, released thousands of young soldiers on leave in towns like Cookeville, and khaki became the town’s color.

She went with friends to dances at the USO. “It was an educational experience. They came from all over — Brooklyn, California — and they were shocked by our accents and we were by their’s.”

“They were lonely and enjoyed our company. We were just teenagers and we were not fully aware of what they were facing, but I think they were and they just tried not to think about it,” she said.

Nancy Jarrell wrote in the Highballer, the newsletter of the Cookeville Friends of the Depot organization, of an especially vivid moonlit summer night in 1943 when the train took those young men away to Europe and combat.

With most of Cookeville’s sons, brothers and young husbands gone to war, residents here had taken the soldiers into their homes for meals, made them presents at Christmas, adopted them as their own, she said.

“And so it came to pass...that when that first long troop train pulled out that summer night, the faces at the windows had become familiar and had names.

“Thousands of little connections had been made: a button sewn on, a letter written, a phone call made, a pingpong match won, a birthday cake baked, a few hundred miles ‘stomped at the Savoy,’ a hand held, a kiss given and received. These were not just troops — they were young men in our lives who were about to become memories.”

Trains brought Cookeville’s own young men home in 1945 and ‘46 — and some as late as 1949 when their remains were shipped home from temporary graves on faraway battlefields.

Business in World War One put the Tennessee Central Railroad firmly on its feet and the TCR saw a heady heyday in WWII, but its decline afterwards was steady and sure. Many of the returning GIs bought cars with their service pay, freight trucks began to seriously strangle rail business and the nation’s demand for coal and the trains that carried it dropped.

Smellage Cemetery, Boma, Putnam Co., TN

*Nichols, Imogene Carr

b. 1 December 1916 – d. 4 August 2002

(d/o William Matthew Carr & Margaret Frances Gentry)

‘A woman, a wife, a mother, a friend, an angel in heaven’

*Nichols, James “Pete” Maddux

b. 10 June 1923 – still living as of January 2010.

‘He loved his family his friends and the hills of Tennessee.

(s/o James Grimes Nichols & Edith Mabel Maddux)





Robert Lonzo Maxwell, 1881 – 1957, standing on the left, and his wife Bertha Askew Maxwell, d/o Johnson “John” T. Askew & Nancy Elizabeth Bates, standing next to him, and their children: Edward Frye Maxwell; Thurman Hooper Maxwell, who married Roberta Farley; and Ernest O’Neal Maxwell, married Viva Younger. Kneeling, in front: Bernice Lorne Maxwell, married Charlie Maynard; Ardith Reva Maxwell, married Charles Leland Maddux; Mary Pauline Maxwell, married Edward Ryan; and Frances Elizabeth Maxwell, who married Benton M. Lee. There was another daughter, Nancy Elizabeth Maxwell, who died in infancy. This family owned and operated a general store in Buffalo Valley from the 1930’s until 1957. The store was built by Mr. Maxwell and Cass Leftwich. It consisted of two floors and weather boarded exterior. Also built nearby were buildings that consisted of a beauty shop, creamery, barber and shoe repair shop. The produce building nearby was where chickens, corn, fertilizer, and black walnuts were bought and sold. The store was a popular gathering place as local people came to trade, visit, and exchange news.

Courtesy of Nancy Billingsley.

<http://www.ajlambert.com>