

THE COUNTY FARM POOR HOUSE

By Charlie Hunter

"Siftings from Putnam County, Tennessee" by Mary Hopson, pp 71-74.

The Country Farm was a home for the homeless whether they be young or old. The children could only stay until some family would adopt them. The older people could stay as long as they lived if they so desired.



Sometime before 1896, Putnam County bought a farm consisting of about 150 acres. It was located about 5 miles west of Cookeville on what is now known as County Farm road. At the beginning the County Farm road started at highway 70 and dead ended at the County Farm. Then about 1940 the road was continued on till it linked up with the Gainesboro Grade road on the north end.

The first buildings consisted of a large L shaped two story wood framed structure with a hall down the center and rooms on each side with living quarters for the manager and his family. The house was thought to be about 100 feet long with double decked porches on one side. It was on the east side of the road on a hill side. One side of the house was low on the ground and the other side was tall enough to walk under.

There was a large oak tree about 50 feet east of the house which is still standing. A spring beside the tree was used to keep the milk cool as there was no refrigeration.



Kerosene lamps were used for lights and cooking was done on a wood stove. A small log house was located just east of the main house which was also used to house patients. The log house was later torn down and moved to a location on the northside of the Gainesboro Grade road near where the county farm road enters the Grade and is still standing. A large barn was

located a little farther east and is still standing.

The water supply came from a large spring just east of the barn. As there was no electricity, a hydraulic ram was installed near the spring to pump the water. The ram needs to be 18" to 24" below the water supply. The ram set there and pounded day and night keeping the water supply plentiful.

A manager was hired to over see things and he then hired farm workers. This was all controlled by the County Court which was made up of one justice of the peace from each district. The justice of the peace was later called County Commissioner. Also, we first had a country judge now that has been changed to a County Manager. When the County Court would meet a committee made up of Country Court numbers would go and inspect the country home.

In the event the farm didn't support the home, the county taxes were used to take care of the expenses. The country taxes came from property tax which would amount to about fifteen dollars for a 50 acre farm. Also all men that were over 21 years old were required to pay a \$2 per year poll tax. The way this was enforced was you were required to have a poll tax receipt before you were allowed to vote. Also, in those days the county didn't maintain the county road. Each man over 21 were required to work the road for three or four days per year. If you had a team of horses you were suppose to bring them and haul creek gravel or scoop dirt with a horse pulled scoop. The country owned a horse pulled grader and it took about six horses to pull this grader to grade the roads.

Myrtle Flatt told me about her uncle, Bill Rippetoe and his wife Sara Jane, went there to manage the County Farm in about 1896. He is the first manager I was able to get any information on. She said they were there for twenty years which would bring it up to about 1916. The Rippetoe's were neighbors to my parents after they retired from the county home. They seemed to want to do something to make children happy. As a small child I remember my sister and I going to visit them. I don't know why it was a big deal, but we generally wanted something to eat when we visited. Mrs. Rippetoe would just tell us to go to the kitchen and help ourselves. Most people called Bill (Bealo) and he would do things to make us happy. It was unusual for an older person to play with children at that day and time. I remember his and Sara Jane going to town in a buggy and he gave me a bunch of pennies to keep his dog from following them.

I remember hearing my father Alphus Hunter talk about working for Bealo when he managed the County Farm at wheat thrashing time. This would have been about 1906. the wheat had to be spread out to keep it from over heating. So they carried it upstairs in bags and spread it out on the floor in one of the rooms.

Bealo and Sara Jane didn't have any children and while they were operating the County Farm a little boy was brought there. I heard Sara Jane tell the story and she said some men were there talking to Bealo about getting the little boy adopted. She said the little boy looked up at Bealo and said; "B, are you going to let them take me away?" So he and Sara Jane adopted him. To give you an idea how long ago this has been the little boy grewed up and was a soldier in World War I. He returned from the war married and raised a family. He went by the name of Charlie Rippetoe.

As Myrtle Flatt remembers, Will King was the next manager which lasted from about 1916 to 1918. Willis Brown was the next manager which seemed to be from about 1918 to 1920.

Owen Jaquess was manager for a while – he left there in 1929.

According to Dimple Williams her father Finas Palk came to the County Farm as manager in 1929 and she said they still didn't have electricity at that time.

In a large brick building was erected by W.P.A. for a county home. It was located on the west side of the County Farm road just a little south west of the original building. B. C. Huddleston was County Judge at that time.



Jess Davis and R. N. Pendergrass was the carpenters on the job and Watson Whitson was one of the brick masons.

At the time about the only remedy for T.B. was plenty of fresh air and sunshine. Shortly after the new building was

finished it was decided they needed a screen room for T.B. patients.

Oakley and Lawrence Chaffin were employed to build the screen room and a room for the mentally disturbed people who needed to be confined. Dimple Williams told me they had a room where homemade coffins were kept. When they thought someone was going to die they would pad one with cotton, cover it with cloth putting some lace around for trimming. When the person died the farm hands would take them out to the cemetery on the County Farm and bury them.

In the spring of 1991, I went and tried to find this cemetery but had no luck. Norman Elrod was one of the farm workers in the late nineteen thirties. He said some of the graves just had field rocks for markers and some had marble ones. I looked in the area where I was told it was located, but didn't see any sign of it. Apparently the stones had been removed and the ground had been cultivated. Norman said he help bury several when he worked there.

Norman said at that time his pay was twenty dollars per month with room and board.

He said the longest number of patients he remembered them having at one time was 28.

He said they would butcher 12 to 15 hogs and 2 beef cattle per year for the meat.

Somewhere about 1937, Finas Palk left and Alvin Palk went there as manager. During this time my father operated a country store and he furnished them groceries for a while. The way he got paid he would take the bills to the county judge's office and he would

write him a warrant for the amount. He would take it to the trustee's office and if he had the money he would write dad a check and if he didn't then dad would had to wait until he could collect some taxes. This was the way school teachers and other people got paid that had debts against the county.

John Goodpasture was always hanging around outside the country judge's office and he saw some one get a warrant he would stop them and try to buy it a 9-10 percent discount. Dad never sold him any. The trustee was Jim Robinson and he was good about paying the bills as soon as possible.

After Alvin Palk left Finas Palk came back and stayed until the early nineteen and fifties when the county court d4ecided to close the county home and move the patients to a nursing home.

Putnam County hired a county health doctor by contact to doctor the people at the county home and to vaccinate the school children of the county. Some of the doctors were Z. L. Shipley, Jeff Dyer, R. H. Millis and Fred Terry.

Sometime in the nineteen and thirties, I can remember seeing a lady at the fair that stayed at the county home. She always had two big pockets on her apron and they were always full of something. She would ride the merry-g-round and always seemed to be having the best time. I have seen her there at various times. I was told her name was Mary Spivey.

In a few years after the county home was closed Willow Avenue Church of Christ leased the property for Happy Haven Home for children.

Lou Ora French

b. 10 March 1899, TN – d. 22 May 1905, d/o **Ransom Provine French**, b. 30 April 1873, TN – d. 19 December 1925, Overton Co., TN & **Mary E. Thompson**, b. June 1882, TN – d. ?, d/o **William Andrew Thompson** (1864-1915) & **Elizabeth "Lizzie" M.**

(**Source:** Tennessee State Marriage record, Overton Co., TN, pg. 196 – R. P. French married 28 March 1898, Overton Co., TN to Miss Mary Thompson).

(1900 census 11th Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN: Dwl: 14 – **Ransom P. French** is head of household, 27 yrs. old, b. April 1873, TN, md 2 yrs. to **Mary E.**, 17 yrs. old, b. June 1882, TN, 1 child born, 1 child living. Child: **Lou O. French**, 1 yr. old, b. March 1899, TN).

(1910 census 2nd Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN: Dwl: 63 – **Alexandria Smith** is head of household, 58 yrs. old, TN, (occupation: Laborer odd jobs), md 36 yrs. to **Laura B.**, 52 yrs. old, TN. Children: Herbert E., 20 yrs. old, TN, (occupation: Laborer odd jobs). & Sallie Smith, 18 yrs. old, TN. Living in the household: **Ransom P. French**, 36 yrs, old, TN, boarder, divorced, (occupation: Laborer odd jobs). & **Eulan Ray**, 23 yrs. old, TN, boarder, single, (occupation: Laborer odd jobs).

Tennessee Death and Burials Index, 1874-1955.

Name: Ransom Provine French
Birth Date: 30 Apr 1873
Birth Place: State of Tennessee
Age: 52
Death Date: 19 Dec 1925
Death Place: Overton County, Tennessee
Burial Date: 19 Dec 1925
Cemetery Name: L N Oakleys
Gender: Male
Race: White
Marital Status: Divorced
Occupation: Merchant
Mother's name: French
Mother's Birth Place: Tennessee
FHL Film Number: 1299789

Source: Putnam County Tennessee Cemeteries by Maurine Ensor Patton & Doris Gilbert Garrison, pg. 188:

COUNTY FARM (POORHOUSE) CEMETERY

Located on the late Major Shipley farm – now belongs to TTU, Putnam Co., TN. There is only one marker here:

Lou Ora French, b. 10 March 1899 – d. 22 May 1905

Thought to be buried here in unmarked graves: information from Charlie Hunter

John Childress (did farm work for Liza Pippin died 1930s)

Mary Spivey

Tom Odum

Tessie Lowhorn

Mr. Ward

Buried here and information taken from death certificates:

Lizzie Anderson: DC #359, Putnam Co., TN: d. 13 March 1916, age abt. 84 yrs. – parents unknown

George Jernigan: DC #396, Putnam Co., TN: d. 1 May 1916, age abt. 50 yrs. – parents unknown

Elizabeth Edmonds: DC #30, Putnam Co., TN: d. 14 February 1915, age abt. 84 yrs. – parents unknown

Unc Ferrell

Unknown b. -----

d. 1 Sep 1915

Age: abt 65y

Unknown
Unknown -----
County Farm Putnam
#168

Easter Jernigan

Unknown
b. -----
d. 28 Sep 1919
Age: 95y
Unknown
Unknown -----
County Farm Putnam
#472

Alf Johnson

Unknown
b. -----
d. 12 May 1929
Age: abt 78y
Unknown
Unknown -----
County Farm
White
#14332

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