

WAY BACK WHEN: LOOKING BACK IN HISTORY
Happenings in the Cookeville area as recorded in the pages of the
Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN.

By Bob McMillian

1920's

(Compiled by Audrey J. Lambert)

<http://www.ajlambert.com>

1921

(May 10, 1921) Mary F. Denny has become the first woman in Putnam County to run for a county office. She has announced her candidacy to run for the office of Putnam Trustee on the Democratic ticket.

1922

(30 March 1922: Putnam County Herald, Cookeville, TN): PROGRESS, STABILITY AND ENDURANCE:

For more than twenty five years the Gainesboro Telephone Company has stood the test and shown improvement and advancement each year of its life. Starting with a few poor constructed grounded lines and badly arranged exchanges, it has grown and improved year by year until its main toll lines are copper enabling its subscribers in this section to talk to any point in the United States and in Cuba over metallic lines connected directly with every telephone.

Practically the same officers have served this Company during all these years. The death of Captain George Stephens in 1921 closed an unbroken career as President since its organization. He first served this section as captain in the Confederate army and during his long and useful life could always be found at the head of all advancement in the Upper Cumberland Section.

His successor as President, Mr. A. G. Maxwell of Cookeville has likewise been identified with the Company almost since its organization and is one of the leading business men of Tennessee. His large business interest and extensive commercial connection throughout the country insures the Company's continued progress and influence in the telephone world. The active officers in charge of the business, James N. Cox, First Vice President and General Manager and Stephen Hayden Young, Secretary and Treasurer have been connected with the business almost since the year one and of course assumes the responsibilities of the operation and maintenance of the whole system.

R. L. Farley, one of Cookeville's most progressive businessmen is one of the new Vice Presidents of the company and Chas S. Stanton is the new Auditor.

G. A. Maxwell of Nashville has for a long time been identified with the company as Assistant General Manager and he together with Mrs. Hume, also of Nashville, one of the best known telephone men thought out the whole Southland serving this company as director, are continually in touch with the business and are ever alert in its behalf.

A new Director added at the last general meeting was Mr. E. C. Knight of Livingston, one of the best known attorneys of this whole section, while the Gainesboro Telephone Company undertakes to conduct its affairs, so as not to resort to lawsuits, it is in good position to take care of its legal affairs with its able General Counsel. A. Algood of Cookeville who has successfully served the Company in that capacity for a number of years, together with Mr. Knight who will be added to the group as assistant counsel.

The Upper Cumberland Section, extending far into Kentucky is proud of this wide awake Company and its continued growth and prosperity is the best evidence of good will and confidence among its partners.

(6 April 1922, Putnam County Herald, Cookeville, TN):

NEW ICE CREAM ESTABLISHMENT:

Maloney and Alloway are preparing to furnish Cookeville and surrounding towns and communities with pure ice cream during the coming season in such quantities as may be desired and at prices more reasonable than it has been possible to get cream heretofore. This new and enterprising firm are now putting in an equipment large enough to supply the needs of this section and are taking every precaution to have a sanitary ice cream factory. The freezers will be run by electricity and in fact everything will be modern and up-to-date. Ice cream will be furnished families or firms in quantities from one quart to five or ten gallons or more. The new concern hope to be in a position to fill orders by April 15th and they cordially invite the public to call at their place of business in the Scott block, on Cedar street and inspect their plant. Don't have your cream shipped from a distance when you can get it fresh and pure right here at home.

(May 2, 1922) Charlie Hughes, who later will go on to radio and national media fame as the Baxter Bugler, begins his 31-year daily ritual of climbing a 20-foot pole in his year at dawn and playing the horn he ordered from a Sears-Roebuck catalog.

(20 November 1922: Putnam County Herald, Cookeville, TN):

HERALD IS SOLD AGAIN:

Ante over, over she goes!

That's what the small boys say when they are ready to "play ball," and it would seem that during the past two years the Putnam County Herald has been "playing ball" and has been going up and over, and then back again, to suit the convenience of those who have happened to be temporarily in control of the property.

Something near twenty-four months ago E. L. Wirt and son, Ralph, who for more than twenty years had been owners, editors, managers and publishers of the paper, conclude that they were tired of type and presses and longed for the open air and rest from the ceaseless grind. Mr. Wirt, the elder, sold two-thirds interest to an association of local business and professional men, while Ralph Wirt, retaining one-third of the property, planned to remain with the business for a short while and then retire to enter a different calling. W. Y. Bennett, formerly in the newspaper business at Livingston and at other places, was employed to manage the Herald. He also purchased an interest in the plant. This arrangement continued until to be continued....

1923

(25 January 1923: Putnam County Herald, Cookeville, TN):

MANY NEWSPAPERS HAVE BEEN BURIED IN PUTNAM COUTNY:

A Dozen of More Sheets Have Bloomed and Died Since the Herald Was Established in 1903.

Newspapers, like men, come and go. The history of the various publications that have been launched in Putnam county during the past twenty years does not read like romance for the reason that their history is identical. They have been started, made much noise in regard to their great plans, whooped it up for a brief period, bloomed out of season, faded and died, leaving the dear people who paid in their shekels on subscription with a sack to hold.

Each one in turn has solemnly vowed that their sole purpose of afflicting the community was to serve the public. All of which was untrue. Every newspaper ever established was started for the purpose of making money for its owners, like any other business.

Most of the Putnam county journals that have gone to the happy hunting grounds were published in Cookeville but that did not seem to help much. Several met their fate in Monterey, one simple minded cuss started one in Algood, and, if memory serves us aright, two were put forth in Baxter, inglorious failure attended each and every venture. And there is a reason they could not stand the gaff.

It takes years of time, much hard work and the ability to live on next to nothing, to establish a small town newspaper on a firm basis. The financial returns are less than in almost any other business and the publishers must win the confidence of the people generally, which takes time.

During all the years so many men failed in the newspaper game in Putnam county the Herald has plodded along, gaining from year to year in public favor, its patronage increasing steadily until it has become a fixed institution of the county. It has been under the same management, except for two years, and is again controlled by its founders. Their policy has always been to deal fairly and honestly with the public and with every patron.

After twenty years of service along these lines the Herald has achieved an enviable position of which it is justly proud.

As its business grew the Herald owners have always sought to keep pace by adding new and costly machinery and now it has the most complete printing plant to be found in the state in near the size of Cookeville. Each of the owners is an expert in his line, having had experience and training. They, therefore feel justified in saying that they are fully prepared to serve the public, in a really acceptable manner.

Mindful of the never failing support of the generous people of Cookeville and Putnam county, the Herald takes occasion to thank them and pledges its utmost endeavors to merit a continuance of the kindly relations that have so long existed.

(22 February 1923: Putnam County Herald, Cookeville, TN):

GROWTH OF HERALD HAS BEEN STEADY FOR TWENTY YEARS:

Starting in a Small Way, the Business Has Grown With the Community of Which it is an Integral Part:

In December, 1899, Walter A. Wirt recently returned from the Philippine Islands where he had served as a member of the First Tennessee Regiment during the Spanish-American war and native insurrection, bought a job printing plant and together with E. L. Wirt operated it in Cookeville for three years. On Jan. 1, 1902 the latter bought the business and as soon as the necessary additional machinery could be secured began the publication of the Putnam County Herald, the first issue being dated Feb. 11, 1903.

The press on which the paper was printed was what is called an "Army press" a small portable machine, here-with shown in the picture, which cost \$50, it would take two of the small four-column pages of the Herald as then made up made up, and was operated by hand, a boy inking the type forms also by hand.

The plant had one small job press, an 8x12 Colt's Armory, and the necessary amount of type and other articles. The total investment represented about \$750. E. L. Wirt was the editor and publisher and did all the work with the assistance of his son, Ralph H. Wirt, for several years. The subscription price of the Herald was 25 cents a year and the circulation increased rapidly. By rigid economy the publisher slowly accumulated a small surplus with which better equipment was bought and improvements made, about which our readers will be told next Monday.

During the period of time above referred to the office was located in the rear end of the jewelry store of Alvin Wirt on the west side of the public square, just about where the open way in the Arcade building is at present.

(22 February 1923: Putnam County Herald, Cookeville, TN):

NEWS EVENTS OF TWENTY YEARS AGO IN COOKEVILLE:

Items From The Herald of February 11, 1903 – Ernest Puckett Was First Subscriber For Paper:

Ernest Puckett was the first person to subscribe for the Herald, and will keep posted on local affairs through its column at his new home in Nashville.

Dr. G. N. Guthrie went to Gallatin on Saturday to visit home folks for a few days. Speaking of the doctor, he was the first Cookeville subscriber to the Herald.

Rev. G. W. Nackles went to Nashville on Monday to be present when the senate knocks out Putnam county's only saloon.

The Morgan Produce Co. shipped a carload of eggs last Saturday to New York City. By the way, did you every stop to think of how many hen fruits it takes to fill a car?

Circuit Court Clerk Proffitt is at Goffton on business and J. A. Carlen is attending to the clerk's duties.

Judge Robert Cantrell of Lebanon died suddenly on Monday morning. He was born in Cannon county 85 years ago, and was for many years a circuit court judge and one of the best known and most highly esteemed citizens of the state.

Another Cookeville boy has won distinction away from home. As is known to most of our readers W. S. McClain has been studying osteopathy at the Southern College of Osteopathy at Franklin, KY. He was graduated a few days ago with highest honors, in a large class, and is now a full-fledged Doctor of Osteopathy.

(March 1, 1923) Dr. W.A. Howard has established a 12-bed hospital in a two story building on East Spring Street.

(May 11, 1923) A tornado zig-zagged through Overton County's Bethesda community two miles east of Monroe during the night this week, cutting a $\frac{3}{4}$ mile swath that left 20 dead and dozens injured.

The newspaper describes it as the worst twister to ever hit this section of the state. Among the victims were a husband and wife and their seven children who were apparently killed in their sleep.

Reporter Sam K. Neal toured the wreckage and talked to witnesses who say the tornado flattened houses, took a barn and the heavy farm machinery inside it and swept it away like a matchbox, and snatched a new automobile hundreds of feet into the air and dashed it to the ground.

The morning after the storm, a square of linoleum flooring was found sliced into a tree, a fruit tree was found with pieces of straw driven into it like nails, and in the wreckage of a hen house, two chickens were found nesting on eggs, apparently untouched by the violent storm that swept over them during the night.

(24 May 1923: Putnam County Herald, Cookeville, TN);

Mrs. Whittaker Oldest Woman in Putnam County:

Mrs. Elizabeth Whittaker of the Third civil district enjoys the distinction of being the oldest person in Putnam county. She will be one hundred years old on Sept. 3rd. She is the widow of Elias Whittaker, who

died about fifteen years ago. Her general health is good and she enjoys the use of faculties to a wonderful degree. She joined the Baptist church when she was thirteen years old – 86 years ago and is probably the oldest Baptist in the country. She is the mother of fourteen children, several of whom are now dead. One of her sons, John Whittaker, a Civil war pensioner, is now eighty-three years old. Mrs. Whittaker and her son, John Whittaker, reside with the latter's son, D. L. Whittaker, a man probably sixty years old and himself a grandfather.

(June 12, 1923) Dr. Harry Upperman is sent from Pennsylvania to Baxter with orders to shut down the financially failing Baxter Seminary. Instead, he convinces the international General Board of the Methodist Church that the school can be saved and under his leadership, it slowly becomes a successful educational institution.

1924

(January 7, 1924) The term of Cookeville Mayor A.P. Barnes expires today and the newspaper looks at his record for the past three years. His top accomplishments include a hydroelectric dam built and being successfully operated at Burgess falls for \$115,000, and a new brick city school building erected for \$75,000.

(January 10, 1924) A debate has been going on in the newspaper for weeks now over the question of whether a woman's place is in the home.

It continues this week with a letter from a writer who calls herself "Happy Girl" and says, "I am not married and don't know that I ever will but, if I do, I want a husband who realizes there are other places for a woman than in the kitchen or the corn field."

She goes on to comment on the newest controversial hairstyle, bobbed hair. "I don't want my hair bobbed, but those that bob their hair are nothing to me."

On short skirts: "I believe in being decent, but I don't believe in wearing a skirt like a riding skirt. We're not living in the 60's now and times change and we change with them."

(February 4, 1924) The Tennessee Central had its biggest year on record last year and Cookeville's depot did the most business of anywhere on the line.

Total proceeds for Cookeville station in 1923: \$278,59, an increase of nearly ten percent in one year, says Rutledge Smith, general agent for the company, who notes it's a sign of assured growth for Cookeville.

Meanwhile, White County deputy W.C. Welch was slain during a raid by he and two other deputies on a moonshine still operation in the mountains east of Sparta. The trio was ambushed and Welch killed one of the moonshiners before he himself died.

(17 February 1924: Putnam County Herald, Cookeville, TN):

COOKEVILLE PRINTING COMPANY PURCHASES PUTNAM COUNTY HERALD:

Will Continue Publication of Semi-Weekly Herald. Few Changes Made in Personnel of Staff:

Only one local newspaper will greet the readers of Putnam County this week as a result of the purchase of the Putnam County Herald last Saturday by the Cookeville Printing Company, Incorporated, publishers of the Upper Cumberland News. The Herald and the Upper Cumberland News will be combined and published under the name of the Putnam County Herald, and Upper Cumberland News. The paper will be independent in politics.

For the present the consolidated paper will be printed in the Herald office in the Arcade building with Bryce D. Stone, Editor; Ralph H. Wirt, Manager of the Mechanical Department; and Beecher Gentry, as General Manager.

Consolidation of the equipment of the two plants will be effected as soon as a suitable building, plans for which are now under consideration can be erected on the lot adjacent to the old office of the Cookeville Printing Company, in West Cookeville.

The Cookeville Printing Company was recently reorganized, with A. M. Johnson as President, and Beecher Gentry, Secretary-Treasurer. The capital stock was increased at the time and a number of new stockholders entered the organization.

The purchase of the Herald by the Cookeville Printing Company was managed by Quimby Dyer.

(February 28, 1924) The City has adopted a new ordinance forbidding homeowners from letting chickens or geese run at large. They must be properly penned or there'll be a fine.

And Mayor W.A. Hensley says he's instructed police to arrest "reckless autoists" who travel through town too fast.

"I will endeavor to see that this ordinance is enforced even if we have to put plainclothesmen on to see that this menace is stopped."

(March 24, 1924) Quimby Dyer writes in page one letter: "What's the matter with Cookeville? How does it plan to attract industry with poor roads?"

He comments, "Cookeville has about 25 miles of public streets, all in the poorest condition. At the present time, 20 are almost impassable. The other five make a new car look old and worn out in a few months. Some streets are sixty feet wide, some fifty, some forty."

(April 3, 1924) H.S. Barnes, Jr., the four-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. H.S. Barnes, was stuck by a car driven by Charles Cox this week on Walnut Avenue. The fender snagged his clothes after striking him and drug him 40 feet before Cox could stop. The youth only received bruises and scrapes.

1926

(July 1, 1926) Jack Carver becomes the county's first licensed funeral director.

1928

(April 11, 1928) With a crowd of about 200 watching from the banks of the rising Falling Water River, the partially earthen Burgess Falls Dam collapses after a night of heavy rains and washes away the newly constructed electric power production plant that supplies power to Cookeville.

1929

(January 16, 1929) County road supervisor H. D. Whitson gave his annual road report for 1929 this week. Operating on a \$13,827 budget and using the labor of jail inmates and horse-drawn road graders, he reported that he graded a new road in Martins Creek, graveled Buffalo Valley Road and Fisk Road, and did a considerable amount of work improving Buck Mountain and Phifer Mountain Roads.

(February 26, 1929) The Cookeville City Commission approves construction of a concrete and steel dam at Burgess Falls to replace the dam washed away last spring. The reservoir the dam will create will power Cookeville's new electric generation facility until 1944 when the city contracts with TVA for electricity.

<http://www.ajlambert.com>