

## **MODERN BUILDING FAR CRY FROM ANCIENT LOG JAIL**

Putnam County Herald, Cookeville, TN: 9 June 1960

Putnam county's new jail stands as a tremendous improvement over the facility now in use and a far cry from the original log jail used for shelter.

Open house at the modern brick, steel and concrete structure, will be held Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Prisoners-there are 32 in the old jail today-are expected to be transferred to the new quarters some time next week.

If being in jail can be enjoyable, they should be happy in the spanking new cells. But they can no longer stand at the windows and look through the bars. They cannot reach the widows from the new cells.

Also, any escape-minded prisoner will have a difficult task ahead of him. He would have to break out of his cell, then through a widow of door. And the hallways also can be kept locked.

The bars are of case-hardened, tool-resistant steel, and the locks are designed for maximum security. They are described as "escape-proof".

Judge Jimmy Mosier, who has closely supervised construction from the start, points to the fact the structure is approved for housing federal prisoners.

"This is especially important here, where Federal court sits," Mosier says. "When the county houses federal prisoners, of course, that brings in revenue toward upkeep."

Mosier pointed out it was necessary to meet federal standards as to safety, car of prisoners, etc. This, he said, made it doubly certain the jail would meet top standards in every respect.

Mosier praised the architects, Wilson and Odom, of Nashville, the general contractors, Bohannon Construction Co., Lafayette, and the various sub-contractors, for their cooperation in planning and constructing the building.

The sheriff's quarters face the Washington Avenue side of the jail, and his office is on Staley Avenue, considered the front of the structure. One end is on Freeze Street, and the other practically touches the old jail building, which is to be razed soon. (The old jail building, originally constructed more than 60 years ago, will be razed in the near future).

With the two buildings so close, the contrast is striking. At least part of the jail now in use was condemned approximately five years ago.

It was built shortly after fire destroyed the Putnam County jail in October, 1894 and has been improved and enlarged several times.

There are a few who can remember the original log jail, erected in 1857. Hogs ran around and under the jailhouse.

Mrs. Minnie Snyder, 81, of 27 Church St., remembers when the small jail burned. Her family lived on Washington at the time.

"I had the measles," she recalls. "I ran to the widow to see the fire."

Features of the new jail include a large jury room, complete with new beds; toilet facilities in each cellblock, a hand-operated elevator for sending food from the first-floor kitchen to the upstairs auditorium, and separate quarters downstairs for women and juveniles.

The women's cell block, in the southwest corner, and the juvenile cell block, in the southeast corner, are separated by the sheriff's living quarters and offices.

Sheriff Ernest Webster is especially pleased with the "drunk tanks," which allow confinement of drunk prisoners with greater ease, and the arrangement for visitors. There is a special waiting room for visitors, plus a visiting room where inmates may talk to friends and relatives in private. The prisoner and his visitor are separated by a glass panel. Vents allow them to converse, but the visitor is unable to hand anything, such as a hacksaw blade or a weapon, to the prisoner.

During the past few years, trial jurors who had to be locked up overnight were boarded at Shanks hotel. In the new jail, they can be cared for easily and comfortably in the enclosed jury room.

The jail has 64 bunks, but can house approximately 125 prisoners. It has 16 cellblocks and a large "run around," or auditorium.

The are in front of the jail was blacktopped yesterday afternoon.

#### Members Of Jail Committee:

Members of the jail committee who worked with County Judge Jimmy Mosier in planning the new jail are:

Squire J. T. Dunavin, chairman, Wesley Flatt, Jr., secretary, Vernon Vaden, Elmer Woodford, W. B. Carlen, Jr., Fred Roberson, Charles Ligon, L. L. Halfacre, T. D. Alcorn, Boyd Qualls, Frank McCormick and Dr. Jack Clark.

Also a member was the late Gore Sadler.

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#### Putnam County Herald, Cookeville, TN:

Thursday, 20 November 1922

#### FOUR MEN MAKE ESCAPE FROM THE PUTNAM COUNTY JAIL:

Jim Woody, Fred Carr, Jim Smith and Jim Winford Take French Leave:

At about 11 o'clock Sunday forenoon Jim Woody of Cumberland county, Fred Carr of Silver Point, Jim Smith of Crossville and Jim Winford of Alabama exapted from jail during the temporary absence of Sheriff J. M. Lee, and fled to the mountains. They dug the wall under a widow in the corridor. Sheriff Lee got busy as soon as he came in for dinner and by four o'clock in the afternoon had captured three of the bunch. Woody has not yet been apprehended, and Sheriff Lee authorizes the Herald to state that he will pay \$25 for the arrest and return to jail of Jim Woody.

#### Putnam County Herald, Cookeville, TN:

Thursday, 16 January 1931

#### BRO. BILYEU TO PREACH AT THE JAIL, SUNDAY:

Ever since Sheriff Crawford has been in charge at the jail, religious services have been held each Sunday afternoon by various preachers, and for the coming Sunday, January 18, we are requested to announce that Rev. J. P. Bilyeu, well-known Baptist minister, will preach at 2 o'clock. Bro. Bilyeu invites the singers of Lovelady and Wilhite to conduct the singing before preaching. After the preaching, Bor. Bilyeu will lead the staging, using the old book known as the "Harp of Columbia," with Mr. Warren Morgan singing treble. All the old singers who used this book are requested to be present and help sing.

#### Putnam County Herald, Cookeville, TN:

4 February 1932

#### JAIL-BREAK ATTEMPT IS THWARTED BY SHERIFF:

Lee Mills, 35, is in trouble because he tried to get somebody out of trouble.

Saturday afternoon he went to see his brother, Haskell, 25, who is in jail here on a charge of public drunkenness. Haskell persuaded Lee to go to a hardware store and procure a hacksaw blade, according to Sheriff Crawford. The elder Mills got the blade and returned it to his brother at the jail.

Becoming suspicious, the sheriff investigated, found the blade, and got a warrant for Lee. He was taken before Magistrate J. B. Dow here Monday afternoon, charged with attempting to aid prisoners to escape, and was fined and committed to jail.

Today they both have "time" to talk it over.

Putnam County Herald, Cookeville, TN:  
22 September 1932

#### ANOTHER JAIL BREAK ATTEMPT IS THWARTED:

Second attempt to break jail here since a delivery in which eight men escaped was detected Monday night by Sheriff Alex Burton.

Walter had been turned on a brick wall near the spot where the other break was made, and the brick work was loosen, ready for the final work of removing enough to allow escape.

Putnam County Herald, Cookeville, TN:  
Thursday, 4 January 1934

#### OFFICE ANNEX UNDER CONSTRUCTION AT JAIL:

CWA workers started Monday on construction of an office and whisky storage room annex at the jail, to be completed within the next two weeks, Sheriff Burton said, at an approximate cost of \$600. The annex is a much needed acquisition at the jail, as office space and storage room have been crowded for some time.

Sheriff Burton said he will turn the old office into a jail reception room. Prison labor is being used as much as possible, he said, although the CWA has full charge of construction.

Putnam County Herald, Cookeville, TN:  
27 August 1936

#### PRISONER CAUGHT IN ACT OF SAWING BARS BY ALERT DEPUTIES:

Prisoners in the county jail here last night attempted to saw their way to freedom, according to Sheriff Sam Denton Poteet today, but were apprehended before a single one could escape.

About 40 prisoners could have escaped if the prisoner with the saw had had a few more minutes to complete the job. A prisoner from new York, held on the Dyer Act, was caught in the act of sawing the bars of one of the north windows, by deputies L. P. Speck and Clay Buck. The two deputies hearing the familiar noise about 12:15 o'clock this morning hurried to the second floor in time to find the prisoner standing on a radiator working away.

Putnam County Herald, Cookeville, TN:  
10 September 1936

#### THREE PRISONERS REMAIN AT LARGE AFTER JAIL BREAK:

Six Men Escaped From jail here After Digging Hole in Wall – Algood Citizen Captures One:

Three of the six prisoners that dug their way out of the rear wall of the Putnam county jail about 6 o'clock Monday night remain at liberty, according to Sheriff Sam Denton Poteet today.

Three were recaptured near here within a half hour after the break.

Following the break only four prisoners were reported missing but it was later discovered that at the time the roll was called two prisoners had answered for two others who had escaped.

The six who escaped were: Morgan Johnson from Van Buren County, charged with manufacturing whiskey; Dick Skinner, of New York, charged with automobile theft; Granville Smithers and Oscar Welch, both of near Jamestown, charged with robbery, and Ovan Welch, of Double Springs and Wesley Lawson.

**Putnam County Herald, Cookeville TN:**

23 January 1947

Sheriff Harvey Higgenbotham announced that he had thwarted a jail break by Caldwell, Vinson and Semmie Bilyeu, serving a sentence of 11 months and 29 days for assault, Tuesday night when he found a number of bricks loosened in the wall and bars cut. The sheriff said he also found a hacksaw blade and chisel.

**Putnam County Herald, Cookeville, TN:**

14 July 1949

Officers Seeking Fugitive From Jail:

Putnam County officers were searching for a man identified as Leonard Paul Hanlon, 28, who escaped from the county jail here Saturday afternoon.

Sheriff Charlie Pierce said Hanlon is suspected in a automobile theft case.

According to Pierce, Hanlon gained his freedom by sawing through the base of his cell window and climbing down a drainpipe. He said Hanlon's absence was discovered about 5 p.m.

**Putnam County Herald, Cookeville, TN:**

Thursday, 15 January 1953

Trial For Jail Escapee Set Friday:

The January term of Criminal Court which convened here Tuesday was adjourned until Friday after hearing a number of cases and receiving 18 indictments from the Grand Jury.

Trial for Albert Kenneth Bankston who has escaped twice from the Cookeville jail formerly of Mississippi and more recently of Livingston has been set for Friday.

Bankston was captured last Wednesday in McMinnville on his second escape from jail. He walked out of jail after Deputy Taylor Cronk went inside and left the door unlocked behind him. He passed by another deputy sheriff who thought he was a trusty.

Launching immediately on a serious of car thefts, Bankton broke a window in Martin Motor Co. and stole a 51 Buick car. Heading toward Sparta he drove about five miles but the motor got hot so he abandoned the car and caught a ride to Sparta. In Sparta he broke into three motor companies before taking an Ideal Furniture Co. truck but later decided it was too slow and abandoned it on a side street and caught a ride to McMinnville.

Last fall Bankton sawed out a window and escaped from the jail.

### **The Citizen, Cookeville, TN**

30 May 1961

#### **FIRST JAIL BUILT IN 1857**

By the Jaycettes

*(The Cookeville Jaycettes are tracing the city's history, growth and progress as part of the Community Progress Drive).*

The first stores in Cookeville were those of Douglass, Moore and Co., Terry and Son, J. W. Cruthcher and J. C. Freeze.

There were no women in town for more than a year and the four young business men mentioned above, all unmarried, kept "Bachelors' Hall" in a log cabin on the lot just off the square where Dr. Z. T. Hinds later built a home.

A log jail was built in 1857 and was destroyed by fire in October, 1894. This was replaced by a brick building which was later remodeled and was used until 1960 when the modern brick jail was completed.

#### **WHEN COOKEVILLE HAD ONE POLICEMAN**

by Mary Jo Denton

Cookeville Police Master Officer Marc deClaire looks at the city police force's newly updated website, a project he recently completed. The revamped site contains, among other information, some interesting local history. Herald-Citizen Photo/Ty Kernea

**COOKEVILLE** -- The very first Cookeville Police Department was a force of one.



He was called the "town marshal," his salary was \$600 a year, and in addition to enforcing the law, he was also head of the street department.

That's what a Cookeville city ordinance passed a hundred years ago (June 27, 1912) says.

Later city records in the old minute books show that the first town marshal was J.M. Loftis, and by November of that year, he was in trouble with Mayor J.B. Dow.

The old minutes do not disclose what the trouble was, but the mayor declared the job vacant, told the board of aldermen he had "removed J.M. Loftis for cause" and declared "nominations in order for marshal."

But the five aldermen -- listed as Carlen, Crawford, Scott, R. Smith, and W.B. Smith -- disagreed with the mayor and "after much discussion" nominated Loftis for the job again and hired him back, presumably for the same salary.

That interesting bit of city history was recently dug up by contemporary Cookeville Police Officer Marc deClaire, who was working to upgrade the department's web site and wanted "to have some history included on it," he said.

With the help of City Clerk Cathy McClain, Officer deClaire obtained a copy of the 100 year-old ordinance and placed it on the police department's web site.

He also pointed out to his superiors that "the Cookeville Police Department is officially 100 years old this year," a fact he hopes will lead to some kind of celebration or ceremony at least.

No information about the first officer here, J.M. Loftis, is given in the city records, but Officer deClaire is still digging, trying to find out more about the man.

The contrasts between that very first officer and those of today are enormous.

J.M. Loftis was no doubt a native of this area and probably worked for some time as the only officer. He patrolled a much smaller town and had far fewer tools to use in his work than do the city's 70 police officers today, who are armed with the latest weapons and equipment, including computers and cell phones, and many of whom are not natives of Cookeville.

Several of today's officers, including deClaire, came here from other cities and states, as did Officer deClaire.

Their work, which is described on the updated web site, has little resemblance to the tasks which that long ago city council assigned to the town marshal.

In addition to policing, J.M. Loftis was also expected to "see to it that the streets, alleys, lanes and sidewalks of the town are kept free and unobstructed, and in good repair," the 1912 ordinance says. He was also tasked with collecting delinquent taxes.

Officer deClaire said he found what he learned about that first police department very interesting. It may well have been that Marshal J.M. Loftis looked upon police work the same way deClaire does:

"I wanted a job that was challenging," deClaire said when asked why he went into police work.

He also struggled to find another word that he feels describes the work of a police officer, and after much thought, he said it: "Noble."

He is excited about discovering the old minutes and the story they tell, and he hopes that century mark will be publicly noted.

"A centennial only comes once in a lifetime," he said.

Officer deClaire came to this area a few years ago from Florida, where he was a police officer for several years. He chose this area due to its "lack of hurricanes, its low property taxes, and its quality of life," he said.

He has been on the police force here for three years. He is proud of the work he has done to update and liven up the Cookeville Police Department's web page, and he encourages everyone to check it out at [www.cookevillepolice.com](http://www.cookevillepolice.com)

There you can read about police work in this city today, and you can read the city ordinance of 100 years ago which started the police department.

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: 6 April 2012.

## PUTNAM SEEKS FAMILIES OF FALLEN DEPUTIES FOR MEMORIAL

By TRACEY HACKETT

**PUTNAM COUNTY** — The Putnam County Sheriff's Office is planning a memorial service later this year to honor its deputies who've given their lives in the line of service.

And organizers want to extend a special invitation to that service to those deputies' next of kin and family members.

"This memorial has been needed for a long time and I am pleased that we will be able to honor these deputies who gave the ultimate sacrifice for the citizens of Putnam County," said Sheriff Eddie Farris. "We encourage everyone to come and join us as we honor these men and their families on May 16."

Four Putnam County deputies through the years have paid that ultimate sacrifice.

The first recorded incident happened on Aug. 9, 1899, when **Deputy J.J. "Jack" Lee** took a 150-foot fall while searching for a fugitive.

Two deputies in two different situations have been killed by gunfire.

More than 30 years after Deputy Lee's fatal fall, **Deputy Orville A. "Amos" Moss** died after being shot while he was attempting to halt a moving vehicle.

That happened on April 22, 1930.

Only four years later, on Sept. 23, 1934, **Deputy Milton Otis Loftis** was shot and killed at a residence where he was attempting to serve a warrant when someone inside that residence fired a gun through the closed door.

The last time a Putnam County deputy sacrificed his life in the line of duty happened on Sept. 4, 1942, when **Deputy John Morgan Bilbrey** was struck by a vehicle.

"We would like to extend a special invitation to the memorial service for the families of each of these fallen Putnam County deputies," said Sgt. Jamie Greenwood.

Deputy Fred Parker said, "It would mean a lot to the entire department to have each of these families represented here on the day we pay our respects to our fallen brothers."

The Putnam County Sheriff's Office memorial service will be held at 2 p.m. on May 16. It will be open to the public.

It will coincide with many other such memorial services that will be held across the nation and in Washington, D.C., during National Police Week.

National Police Week this year is set for May 15-21.

A standing memorial to the four deputies here who've made the ultimate sacrifice is planned for the grounds of the Putnam County Justice Center.

Family members of the fallen deputies or anyone who would like more information about the memorial may call Sgt. Greenwood or Deputy Parker at 931-528-8484, extension 3259.

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, Putnam Co., TN: 28 march 2016

Read more about Putnam County History at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>