

*A Brief History of*  
**Dickson County, Tennessee**  
*“200 Years of Pride, Promise and Progress”*  
By  
Rick Hollis

*A Brief History of*  
**Dickson County, Tennessee**  
*“200 Years of Pride, Promise and Progress”*

By  
**Rick Hollis**

Dickson County embraces a 490 square mile area on the Western Highland Rim of Middle Tennessee. The Scenic Harpeth River provides a boundary along much of its Eastern border and empties into the Cumberland River in Cheatham County very near the Northeastern corner of Dickson County. The Cumberland River then flows across the Northeast portion of Dickson County for a few miles providing the county with access to this increasingly necessary source of water. The county is transected by Interstate 40, US Highway 70 (Broadway of America), State Route 48 and by CSX Transportation (formerly Louisville and Nashville Railroad line).

Fertile and gently undulating in the Southern portion of the county and hilly in the Northern area of the county, the county's major agricultural products include tobacco, corn and other grains and livestock. The county's 2000 population was 43,156; its six incorporated communities include Burns (population 1,366), Charlotte (population 1,153), Dickson (population 12,244), Slayden (population 138), Vanleer (population 288), and White Bluff (population 2,142).

Although Charlotte is the county seat of government, Dickson is the county's largest city. Dickson boasts several large industries that provide employment for many thousands of employees. They include the following: TENNSCO Corporation, Quebecor Printing, Teksid Aluminum Foundry, Wabash Alloys, Fiesta Grills, Masonite International, Premdor Entry Systems, Sumiden Wire Products, Amhil Enterprises, Tennessee Bun, Porcelain Industries, Shiloh Industries and Crossville Ceramic Tile. White Bluff also has an industrial base with Nashville Wire Products, Ebttide Boats and Interstate Packaging as its principal employers.

Dickson is also home of the Renaissance Center, a private not-for-profit institution that offers a broad spectrum of educational programs and cultural opportunities for individuals from around the world. Its Downtown Shopping District is alive with a variety of specialty shops, eateries and professional offices. The County is also fortunate to have the *Charlotte Courthouse Square Historic District* and the *Cumberland Furnace Village Historic District*, each containing more than 20 historic structures that represent its unique place in history. A walking tour is available for Charlotte and a driving tour is available for Cumberland Furnace. Of special interest to historians and genealogists is the Dickson County Public Library and Life Long Learning Center in Dickson and the Dickson County Archives in Charlotte that house a fine collection of materials concerning the Cumberland Region and its people.

Created by legislative act on October 25, 1803 from a portion of Robertson and Montgomery Counties, formerly Tennessee County, North Carolina, Dickson County originally lay to the West of Davidson County from its creation until Cheatham County was carved from it in 1856. Dickson County was organized as the 25<sup>th</sup> of Tennessee's 95 counties and was named in honor of Dr. William Dickson, a Nashville physician who served as Speaker of the Tennessee House of Representatives (1799-1801) and as a US Congressman (1801-07).

Indians were the first inhabitants of Dickson County – from early mound builders to the more recent Creek, Cherokee and Chickasaws who used this area as common hunting grounds. White men first traveled into the Cumberland Region for trapping expeditions as early as 1714. Jean de Charville and his French associates saw in the furs of these animals as vast wealth and became frequent visitors to the area, eventually building a small settlement near “French Lick”, later settled as Fort Nashborough. Word of the riches of the Cumberland area soon spread into North Carolina and Virginia and other settlers and explorers began to migrate into the region.



**Donelson Flotilla (1779-80) brought the first settlers to Fort Nashborough**

#### **Fort Nashborough**



Early forts were established near present-day White Bluff and Cumberland Furnace to protect against Indian attacks. As the white man continued to take more and more of the Indian's hunting grounds, conflict arose. Even into the 1800s, Indian attacks on settlers in Dickson County were rare, but did occur. One such attack occurred in 1809 when Indians approached the county from the west, crossed the Duck River and came into the western part of the county. They killed Colonel William Garner on his farm near the creek that bears his name, as well as several other people, and destroyed much property.

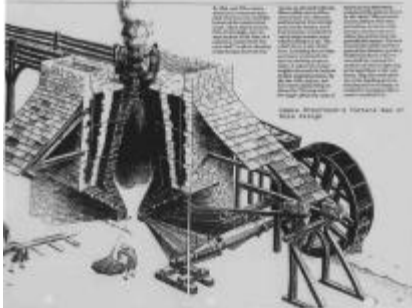
The first land grants in the Dickson County area date to 1786, and were given by governors of North Carolina for services rendered in the Revolutionary War. John Hogg received 640 acres in 1786 when this area was North Carolina. Many of the new residents held land warrants that granted acreage in payment for military services. Others had purchased warrants or land from veterans. More than a few were squatters.

As the long-hunters, known for their long hunting rifles, began to settle Middle Tennessee, it was iron that brought settlers to Dickson County. In 1793, James Robertson and William Sheppard claimed 640 acres of land on a branch of Barton's Creek. As Military General of the Cumberland Region, Robertson was given a percentage of all the land he surveyed.



**Gen. James Robertson**

Discovering the rich iron ore deposits on this property, he claimed the property and within a couple years established an iron furnace, known as the Cumberland Furnace. Other Middle Tennessee counties arose as a result of the settlement of fertile river bottoms and development of plantations, but the Cumberland Furnace and Dickson County became the first industrial settlement in the western United States.



**James Robertson's Cumberland Furnace**

Iron was a necessary commodity for a growing frontier region. In 1793, the western boundary of the United States was marked by the Tennessee Divide – the highest ridge of land which lay between the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers. The Cumberland Furnace was located in a valley just north of this line of demarcation.

Iron was the primary mineral used to manufacture every kind of farm implements, tools, house wares, and weapons. Having a facility in the Cumberland area made these products readily available and eliminated the need to transport these items from North Carolina and Virginia – over the mountains.

Tennessee became a state June 1, 1796. A port facility was established at Betsytown in 1797-8. First known as Fayetteville, it was laid out by William Betts, on the Cumberland, and iron was shipped to Nashville and other points from this facility. Settlers came from many eastern states and settled along the creeks over the entire county, but it was the industrial village of Cumberland Furnace that drew the largest population.



Subsequent to the October 25, 1803 act of the Tennessee General Assembly establishing the county, an act was passed November 7, 1803 that named the first Justices of the Peace for the new county. On Monday, March 19, 1804, they met at the residence of Colonel Robert Nesbitt on Barton's Creek and discussed the process for organizing the new county. The first Justices were: Montgomery Bell, William Doak, William Russell, Sterling Brewer, Gabriel Allen, William Teas, Lemuel Harvey, Jesse Croft and Richard C. Napier, with Robert Drake serving as Clerk *pro. tem.*, and Drury Christian, sheriff *pro. tem.*

On the second day, their first order of business was the naming of county officers to serve until the first regular election, which was scheduled for the first Thursday of June, 1804. The first county officers were Clerk, David Dickson; Sheriff, Benjamin Weakley; Register, James Walker; Commissioner of Revenue, Robert Drake; County Trustee, John Larkins; Wood Ranger, William Caldwell; and Coroner, John Hall.



**Typical Log Cabin**

By summer, the County was organized and on August 3, 1804, the General Assembly passed an act that appointed Montgomery Bell, Sterling Brewer, George Clark, John Davidson and Robert Dunning as commissioners to *“fix on the most central and suitable situation for the erection of a court house, prison and stocks for Dickson County, whose duty it was to purchase forty acres of land on the most reasonable terms, on some part of which the above buildings were to be erected. The commissioners were also authorized to lay off the said forty acres into a town, to be called Charlotte, and to sell said town lots, and with the proceeds of such sales erect and pay for the court house, prison and stocks, and should the money derived from such sales be insufficient to pay all the costs incurred in erecting such buildings, the county court was authorized to levy a tax for such purchase.”*



**Charlotte Robertson**  
Age 83

The town was named in honor of Charlotte Reeves Robertson, the wife of General James Robertson. He was known as the *“Father”* of Middle Tennessee and she as its *“Mother”*. A site was located at an Indian Spring along side an Indian trail about 8 miles south of Cumberland Furnace to establish the County’s seat of government. By 1808 land was acquired from Charles Stewart and the town was platted and lots were sold for both businesses and residences. Between 1810 and 1812, the court house was completed.

Charlotte began to prosper as a town as numerous merchants began to locate in this enclave that was connected with Nashville by 1812. To the west, the road was extended to Natchez, Mississippi and beyond and became an important route to both southern and western destinations. The town became increasingly important as other roads were constructed to Clarksville, Palmyra, Vernon, Columbia and Franklin. For a time...it seemed that all roads led to Charlotte. The Tennessee Supreme Court even met in Charlotte periodically from 1819 until 1821. The town was incorporated December 11, 1837. Thomas Kelley was the first mayor elected in the spring of 1838.

**Destroyed by tornado in 1830, the Courthouse was rebuilt exactly as it had been built in 1810-12**



Tragedy struck the community on May 30, 1830 when a violent tornado ravaged the town. Approaching from the southwest, most of the buildings on the Court Square were severely damaged or destroyed. Many of the townspeople were seriously injured or killed. The roof of the Court House was carried thirteen miles away to the east and records were found as far away as Ashland City. The town was rebuilt and by 1833 most signs of the tornado had disappeared.



**Montgomery Bell**

Montgomery Bell was appointed as one of the original Justices of the Peace for Dickson County and as a Commissioner to locate and organize Charlotte as the county’s seat of government in 1804. He was also appointed to the County’s first school board. On June 18, 1804 he purchased Cumberland Furnace from James Robertson for \$16,000.

Bell was a native of Chester County, Pennsylvania and a hatter by trade. He moved to Cumberland Furnace from Lexington, Kentucky, where he had owned the largest hat shop west of the Alleghenies, employing about 20 people. In fact, one of his designs, the Bell crown hat, one of his designs, became a favorite headpiece among Westerners. Bell came to Tennessee in 1802 and quickly established



**Bell Crown Top Hat**

himself as a community and business leader.

Bell expanded the Cumberland Furnace and developed business interests from Western Kentucky to Northern Alabama. During the War of 1812, Bell kept Cumberland Furnace active by supplying General Andrew Jackson's Southern Army and the navy with two-ounce canisters to thirty-two pounders, double-head and single-head cannon shot.



**Gen. Andrew Jackson**

In 1814, cannon balls produced at Cumberland Furnace were shipped from Betsytown to New Orleans by keel-boats for use in General Jackson's final assault on the British which became the final battle for American Independence on January 8, 1815. Bell had contracts to supply the federal government cannon shot, gun powder and whiskey.



**Cannonballs molded at Cumberland Furnace**

As Bell's business interests grew, he increasingly depended upon his trusted slave, James Worley. Worley is reputed as Bell's first slave and came to Tennessee with Bell. According to a biographical sketch of Montgomery Bell by John Livingston, Worley *"had worked with his master at the hatting trade, and was his most efficient and useful assistant in bringing order out of chaos in which he found the iron business when he commenced it. James frequently carried large quantities of iron and castings to New Orleans and Cincinnati, sold them and received the proceeds, and never a dollar lacking when he made a return of his stewardship...James assisted Bell in selecting ore banks and water powers, and indeed in every branch of his business. James Worley was a very shrewd, sensible, strong thinking man...and Bell stated that he is more indebted to James than to any one else for much of his property."* Bell was asked to sell James Worley for large sums of money on many occasions, and his reply was *"Not for all of New Orleans"*.

As Bell's agent, James Worley became Tennessee's first prominent African-American. It was with Worley's help that Montgomery Bell became Tennessee's first capitalist and industrialist. Bell honored his trusted slave in 1844 by naming his last furnace in his honor. Worley Furnace was located on what is now known as Furnace Hollow Road.

Bell expanded his business interests until his death in 1855 at age 83. He died at a cabin located at his Valley Forge on Jones Creek and was buried at his Pattison Forge located at his Narrows of the Harpeth, then located in Dickson County.



The Narrows was a tunnel chiseled through a narrow limestone hill. It was built by his slaves and effectively shortened the length of the Harpeth River by 7 miles. This created an enormous force that increased the effect of the flow of water to power his forge. When Bell died, he was one of the wealthiest men in the entire South. A portion of his estate, \$20,000., was bequeathed to establish Montgomery Bell Academy, a school for boys in Davidson County.



As the frontier's population increased there developed a disconnect between the difficult life on the frontier and religious practices that were brought from the eastern cities with the pioneers. Accustomed to the conveniences of the East, the pioneers found themselves struggling to build homes for shelter, farms to produce food and industrial communities for commerce. Most of the early Dickson County settlers were from Virginia and Pennsylvania and of Scotch-Irish extraction. They brought with them their religion, which was primarily Presbyterian. The formal practices of the Presbyterian religion failed to comfort the hardships experienced by the early pioneers.



**Narrows of the Harpeth, chiseled by slaves owned by Montgomery Bell – at the site of Pattison Forge on the Harpeth River**



**Typical church setting in the early 1800s**

The Great Revival of 1800 began in Logan County, Kentucky which lies northeast of Dickson County and soon spread across the Cumberland Region and beyond. The people of the region had fallen away from strict religious practices and were searching for a more compassionate and emotional experience. The rigid formality of the Presbyterians was in conflict with the new American ideal of self-determinism. So, when

ministers recognized the need to adjust the practice of religion on the frontier, there was considerable enthusiasm from the public that resulted in substantial growth for the Methodist, Baptist and Christian (Church of Christ) denominations.

On February 3, 1810, the Reverends Finis Ewing and Samuel King came to the home of the Reverend Samuel McAdow at Laurel Furnace to discuss the plight of the Presbyterians and the serious decline of interest in their form of religious practice on the frontier and to discuss the prospects of forming a new presbytery to respond to the needs of their congregants.

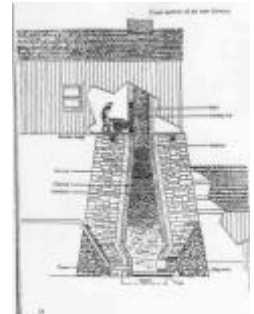


**Replica of Samuel McAdow's cabin**

They went into the crisp winter night to pray – and in fact, remained until daybreak. As the morning dawned, they knew what they should do and that they had heaven's blessing to withdraw from the main Presbyterian body and form a new sect. They entered McAdow's cabin and drew a statement which announced their intentions.

The statement said: *“In Dickson County, Tennessee state, at the Rev. Samuel McAdow’s, this fourth day of February 1810, We, Samuel McAdow, Samuel King and Finis Ewing, regularly ordained ministers in the Presbyterian church, against whom no charge either of immorality or heresy has ever been exhibited before any of the church judicatures, having waited in vain more than four years; in the meantime petitioning the General Assembly for a redress of grievances and a restoration of violated rights have constituted, and do hereby agree and determine to constitute into, a Presbytery, known by the name of Cumberland Presbytery.”* They also renounced completely the doctrine of predestination and adopted the *“Whosoever Will”* doctrine.

Montgomery Bell built the second Cumberland Furnace in 1820 – a modern facility that increased his production considerably over the former Robertson furnace. By 1825, Bell sold his Cumberland Furnace, his Jones Creek forge and 19 tracts of land to Anthony Wayne Van Leer for \$50,000.00, an enormous sum for the day. Van Leer was the nephew of the great Revolutionary War General “Mad” Anthony Wayne. His great-grandfather was one of the foremost iron masters of colonial Pennsylvania and founded the Reading Furnace. Interestingly, his great-grandfather’s partner in the Reading Furnace was Mordecai Lincoln, the great-grandfather of Abraham Lincoln.



**Cross-section of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cumberland Furnace**

The Cumberland Furnace continued to operate until the War Between the States eliminated the available markets for products. The furnace was shut down in early 1862 for the duration of the war but was spared from destruction. This temporary closure ended 70 years as Tennessee’s premier Iron Plantation.

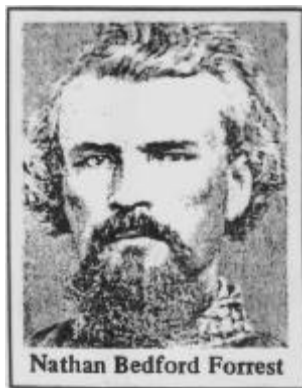
War was not the eager desire of Dickson Countians in early 1861. Tennessee, in particular, was supportive of the Union – President Andrew Jackson, a Tennessean, had been emphatic in the 1830s when he declared *“The Federal Union – It Must be Preserved”*. In fact, in a referendum held on February 9, 1861 to determine if a convention should be held to discuss the matter of secession, the county was evenly divided – 499 for the convention and 490 against the convention. However, they voted 3 to 1 in favor of delegates who supported the union – 813 for Union and 278 for Disunion.

Following Lincoln’s inauguration on March 4, 1861 and the first shots exchanged by Union and Confederate soldiers at Ft. Sumter, local opinions changed rapidly. In response to this action, President Abraham Lincoln called for 75,000 men to be pressed into duty to coerce any State from seceding from the union. Most southern states believed in States Rights and that the Union was comprised of Independent States cooperating as a Federal Union. Lincoln and many of the Northern leaders believed that the Federal Union was sovereign over the rights of any one state. The debate was not a new one – but it was about to be tested because the southerners believed that Lincoln’s call for soldiers to respond to the actions in South Carolina was an act of aggression against one of its sister states.

In a referendum held June 8, 1861 to “Dissolve the Federal Relation between the State of Tennessee and the United States”, Dickson County voters cast ballots with 71 for Union and 1,141 for Separation from Union. Tennessee seceded from the Union and the battle lines were drawn. Tennessee was the last state to withdraw from the Union.

Numerous volunteers formed regiments from Dickson County that fought throughout the war. The most dramatic efforts in Dickson County were championed by the guerillas – un-uniformed citizens who took up arms to fight against the Northern aggression and defended the County. Charlotte was a centrally located transportation hub with roads linking North and South as well as East and West.

The second major battle of the War in the West, following the fall of Ft. Henry on the Tennessee River, was General U. S. Grant’s advance on the Cumberland River against Fort Donelson in Dover in February 1862. The sounds of gunfire and the concussions from cannon-fire were felt in Charlotte and in Cumberland Furnace, some 40 miles away.



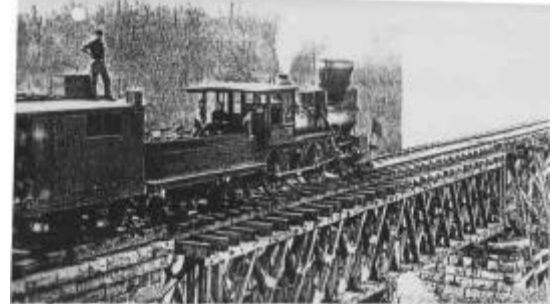
Lieutenant-Colonel Nathan Bedford Forrest led troops through Charlotte on his way to Fort Donelson, and the townspeople knew upon feeling the ground’s quake and the sounds of munitions that War was about to be brought to their doorsteps.

Following the battle at Fort Donelson on February 16, 1862, Forrest and 1,000 men traveled to escape enemy capture. Under the cover of fresh snow and nightfall, they advanced toward Nashville to aid in its defense, anticipating that Grant would proceed to Nashville. After traveling all night and the next day, Forrest and his men found refuge in the village of Cumberland Furnace. Following a night’s rest, they proceeded into Charlotte the next day, having their horses shod and freely refreshing themselves in the saloons on the Court Square. Forrest camped at the Harpeth River on the Charlotte Pike that night and arrived in Nashville the next day.

Following these events, the men of the county who were not enlisted gathered periodically in saloons at Charlotte to plan a defense for the county. Working with scouts from Forrest’s and General Joe Wheeler’s forces regularly traveling through the county, the guerillas were often in command of intelligence of Federal troop movements along the Cumberland River and were able to disrupt the flow of supplies and troops to Nashville. Raids often took place along the Cumberland at the mouth of Yellow Creek in Montgomery County and Betsytown and Harpeth Shoals in Dickson County.

A series of the most successful raids took place in January 1863. General Wheeler sent a unit of his cavalry, under the command of Colonel Wade, to destroy all shipping between Betsytown and the shoal at the mouth of the Harpeth River. On January 13, Wade's forces destroyed two steamers and the gunboat *Sidell* at the Harpeth Shoals. Six days later, the steamer *Mary Crane* was burned at Betsytown.

In November or December 1863, 400 Union troops erected barracks all around the court yard at Charlotte to minimize guerilla activity. They christened the encampment as "Camp Charlotte". A continuous fight was kept up between the Federals and the guerillas, and finally in March 1864 the Federals evacuated the town. So many Union soldiers were injured that the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, which was nearing completion, was used as a Union hospital.



**Train near Dickson and Cheatham County line during construction of the railroad from Kingston Springs to the Tennessee River by Federal troops**

General U. S. Grant was given command of the Grand Army of the Republic in March 1864. Having commanded the first successful Union campaigns on the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers, he was familiar with the area between Fort Donelson and Nashville. Nashville was an interior capital and its security had been kept uncertain by sustained guerilla activity west of Nashville.

One of General Grant's first acts was to order the completion of a railroad from Kingston Springs to the Tennessee River in order to assure the steady flow of supplies from St. Louis, Missouri into Nashville and to points beyond. The 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> U. S. Colored Troops Infantry Regiments, under the command of General W. S. Rosecrans, were assigned to construct the railroad from Kingston Springs to the Tennessee River.



Completing the construction of track that had been begun by Irish immigrants prior to the War, the soldiers were able to complete the new track by autumn 1864. From its completion and dedication by Governor Andrew Johnson in 1864, the track from Johnsonville to Nashville had a steady flow of supplies to reinforce the Union Army, not only in Nashville, but to all points beyond. In fact, Union General William T. Sherman said after the War that he owed his success in the Atlanta



**Typical block house guarding railroad trestles**

campaign to completion of the railroad from Johnsonville to Nashville. Following the end of the War in April 1865, Tennessee was the first state of the Confederacy to reenter the Union. President Andrew Johnson signed the bill in June 1865. Dickson County, like most of the country was relieved that the War had ended.

The War was begun in response to a disagreement of whether Individual States operated independently in the fabric of the Federal Union or the whether the United States was sovereign over the states. One of the most noticeable signs of its result is that before the War, the country was referred to as “*The United States are...*” and after the War the country was referred to as “*The United States is...*”.

A new sense of promise gave optimism of a new day and new successes in the county. In 1865, oil was discovered in the Jones Creek Valley at the depth of 565 feet. Soon afterwards, the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad (N&NWRR) took over the operations of the Federal railroad from the government. The railroad would battle iron as the major influence on Dickson County’s development for the next 30 years.

Soon after the War ended, the Cumberland Furnace was also reopened. Anthony Wayne VanLeer had died on July 9, 1863 and willed his estate to his two grandchildren, VanLeer Kirkman and Mary Florence Kirkman. At the end of the War, Mary Florence Kirkman, who was one of the wealthiest women in the South, shocked Nashville society by marrying Union officer Captain James Pierre Drouillard of Ohio. He had been stationed at Capitol Hill in Nashville near the Kirkman Mansion, the largest home in Nashville. It was designed by Capitol architect William Strickland and was located at the corner of Charlotte and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Its 170 feet of columns gave it the nickname, “*The Palace.*”



**Mary Florence Drouillard**

Ostracized from her family and friends, she and her husband decided to reopen the Cumberland Furnace – an operation that had been saved from destruction by guerillas. The Drouillards prospered as the Cumberland Furnace was one of the only iron furnaces that was not destroyed by Union forces during the War. Almost immediately, they began planning and constructing an enormous mansion on a hilltop overlooking the village of Cumberland Furnace. The Drouillard House (1868-70) was the only grand mansion built in Tennessee during Reconstruction.



**Drouillard Cottage**

The Drouillards operated the Cumberland Furnace until it was sold to the Southern Iron Works on October 17, 1889 for \$140,000. In 1890 the L & N Railroad planned the construction of the Mineral Branch of the railroad and a 6 mile spur was constructed from Vanleer to Cumberland Furnace.

In 1892, with the railroad in place, the Southern Iron Works borrowed \$4,000,000. from The Central Trust Company of New York City to build a modern coke furnace that would operate for another 50 years.

When the Cumberland Furnace finally closed in 1942, it was the longest lived of all Tennessee iron furnaces – having operated for 150 years (1793-1942).



**Southern Iron Works – the 3<sup>rd</sup>  
Cumberland Furnace**

The Nashville and Northwestern Railroad soon became the Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railroad (N.C.&St.L.R.R.). Conrad Berringer of Allegheny City, Pennsylvania laid out a town by 1867. Platted as Smeedsville in honor of a Union trestle engineer E. C. Smeed, the town was the site of a railroad shop and depot which had been built in 1865 at Mile Post 42. Once Berringer platted the town, he advertised in newspapers and magazines in the Northeast for people to come and take advantage of the opportunities which were available. And come, they did.

Dickson began to grow rapidly with both businesses and residences being constructed. People migrated from the North and Northeast to help reshape the new South and to seek opportunities here. They brought their businesses and industries. Prior to the War, iron and agriculture were King in Dickson County, but the industrial revolution was beginning to take shape in the county as a result of the railroad and the transportation links it provided. The county's population doubled between 1870 and 1900.



**NC&St.L. Railroad Depot – Dickson 1910**

Just as Charlotte was a transportation hub prior to the railroad, Dickson was soon to become an important transportation in the age of rail.

Not only did the Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railroad (N.C.&St.L.R.R.) transect the county east and west, but Dickson became the northern terminus of the Nashville and Tuscaloosa Railroad (N.&T.R.R.), which extended from Colesburg to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and the southern terminus of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad's (L.&N.R.R.) mineral branch which extended from Pond Switch to Gracey, Kentucky.



**Train in front of Hotel Halbrook**

Dickson is a railroad town. In fact, every town in Dickson County, except Charlotte, owes its origin and success to a railroad at one time or another. Attempts were made to locate a railroad through Charlotte to Clarksville on more than one occasion, but the business leaders kept the town insulated from the intrusion of the railroad.

Dickson was first incorporated in 1873 and rescinded its charter in 1882 as prohibitionists sought to prevent liquor from being sold inside Dickson. Then on May 12, 1899, the town was re-incorporated and became Dickson County's largest town.

**View of Dickson From Mile Post 42 in 1910**



In the meantime, other towns along the N.C.&St.L.R.R. were being organized. In 1863, Bon Air, or Colesburg, was settled. Burns, Mile Post 36, was settled in 1866 and named in honor of a Union soldier, Captain John Burns. Burns was incorporated in 1953. White Bluff was platted in 1867 and incorporated in 1869. It takes its name from the White Bluff Forge which was located on Turnbull Creek.



**Early locomotive**

Slayden was incorporated in 1913 and Vanleer was incorporated in 1915. These two towns, as well as the unincorporated town of Sylvia were developed in the 1890s by Colonel Robert Stone, the manager of the Cumberland Furnace. They are each located along the abandoned L.&N.R.R.'s Mineral Branch which was built in the early 1890s.

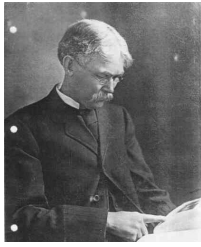
Colonel Robert Stone was a cousin of Mary Florence Drouillard, his mother was a Vanlier, and he married Sarah Jackson, the daughter of Iron Master Epps Jackson. He managed the Cumberland Furnace during the ownership of the Drouillards and Southern Iron Works and Warner Iron Company, under the control of Joseph Warner. Warner's sons were Edwin and Percy Warner, for whom two parks in Nashville are named.

Gilliam Station was settled in 1865. In 1886, an industrialist and land speculator from Chicago purchased a large tract of land on both sides of the railroad and platted a town of 20,117 lots. Each lot had 50 feet fronts. He named the town Tennessee City. In August 1894, Julius Augustus Wayland moved to Tennessee City and established the Ruskin Cooperative Association. Soon, though, the socialist colony moved to the Great Cave area in the Yellow Creek Valley.



**Joseph P. Warner**

Wayland published *A Coming Nation*, a journal with world-wide circulation that espoused socialist teachings. In many ways *A Coming Nation* was the important organ that heralded the achievements and the ideals of the socialist society in America that guided the labor union movement in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Here women's suffrage was practiced. Prosperous factories produced chewing gum and men's leather suspenders.



**Julius A. Wayland**

Talented artisans and idealists moved to become a part of the Ruskin experiment in communal living. For instance, Dr. Walter van Fleet, America's first rosarian, was a member of Ruskin. Of the 29



**Ruskin Stock Certificate**

The county's first school was located at Charlotte in 1823 and was conducted by Jacob Voorhies of New Jersey. That was followed in 1827 when William James opened a school in Charlotte. Tracy Academy was established at Charlotte in 1830. By 1836, Cloverdale Academy was

located on the site of Dickson Middle School on College Street in Dickson



**Dickson Normal College [Main Building, Dining Hall, Chapel and Women's Dormitory]**

roses credited to Dr. van Fleet, 15 are associated with Ruskin. By 1899, internal dissension soon caused the collapse of the colony. It relocated to an area near Waycross, Georgia for a time, but that too disappeared. In spite of its failure, Ruskin is considered the most successful of all socialist experiments in the United States.

Following the demise of the Ruskin experiment, the county's heritage as an educational center was extended with the founding of Ruskin Cave College on the site of the former socialist colony. The College was headed by R. E. Smith and Colonel R. J. Kelley.



**Ruskin Cave College - Main Building**

established on Barton's Creek under the direction of Professor W. B. Bell, followed by his son W. A. Bell. The Charlotte Female Academy was operating in Charlotte by 1840. Following the War, on March 21, 1881 Vanlier Academy was established in Cumberland Furnace by the Drouillards and in 1885 Edgewood Academy was established on Yellow Creek under the direction of Professor W. T. Wade. In September 1891, Professor Wade and Professor T. B. Loggins established Dickson Normal School [College] in Dickson.

This tradition of educational excellence was perpetuated by Dr. Robert E. Corlew, Sr. who served as Superintendent of Dickson County Schools from 1905 until his untimely death in 1930. For twenty-five years his leadership brought the county forward and advanced the small one and two room schools scattered throughout the county to include higher levels of education. During his tenure, a high school was established at Dickson in 1919 and at Charlotte and White Bluff in 1927. Colonel William James donated land for a high school to be built in White Bluff.

Additionally, Dickson Training School for Negroes was established as a two-year high school in the 1920s and became the four-year Hampton High School in 1936.



These kinds of expansions to the Dickson County schools, as well as the



Col. William James

commitment of our citizens was reflected in December 1843 when Spencer T. Hunt and his wife Mary bequeathed their entire estate to be held in trust for the common school fund of both Dickson and Humphreys Counties. A resolution of the General Assembly in 1848 was passed that empowered the state to collect these funds, invest them and distribute them annually. Dickson County received annual payments from the Hunt endowment until it was liquidated and paid in lump sum to the County in the early 1980s.

Education has flourished in Dickson County, and at times the county has been recognized for its excellence when compared with other Tennessee counties. The exceptional devotion to improving our school system by Spencer and Mary Hunt, W. T. Wade, T. B. Loggins, R. E. Smith and so many others was sustained by outstanding Superintendents of School since Robert E. Corlew, Sr. The efforts of W. E. Luther, Sr., Tom T. Sugg, Walter M. Work, James E. Sullivan, Noah D. Daniel, George T. Caudill, David Peeler and Charlie Daniel have taken Dickson County to new heights.

The Charlotte, Dickson and William James High Schools were consolidated into Dickson County Senior High School in 1972 as a result of the popular vote of Dickson County citizens during the 1970 election. In 2002 students from Charlotte and White Bluff have been joined to attend Creek Wood High School on the banks of Jones Creek, midway between Charlotte and White Bluff as part of a comprehensive building plan which was initiated by the Dickson County School Board and funded by the Dickson County Commission during the 1990s and early 2000s.

By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Dickson had overtaken Charlotte and Cumberland Furnace as the commercial and industrial center of the county. The enormous effect of the railroad intersecting at Dickson, combined with an influx of commercial and industrial leaders from northern cities enabled Dickson to develop a new kind of southern inland city. Without river access, the town grew around its transportation links.

One of the first industrial successes was the relocation of A. H. Leathers from Pennsylvania to establish Leathers Handle Factory in 1897. The company became famous for manufacturing the Dixie Swatter baseball bat which was popular with both professionals and amateurs.

The 1910s saw impressive commercial growth in Dickson. Main Street was rebuilt following a great fire in 1905 that destroyed 21 buildings. New hotels were constructed, including the Hotel Halbrook in 1912. A new brick depot was finished in 1914.



**Dickson's Main Street - 1914**

October 29, 1924 was declared a holiday in Dickson by Mayor H. T. V. Miller. Marked by grand celebration, the great climax to one of the many big projects undertaken by the recently formed Dickson County Chamber of Commerce was realized with the opening of the Dickson Branch of the American Cigar Company factory. The new factory was



**Courthouse at Dickson  
1899 - 1927**

located at the corner of Mulberry and College Streets in Dickson.

The occasion marked the end of one full year of the largest community-wide campaign ever undertaken by the 25 year-old Dickson community. The resulting industrial success provided 300 new jobs and a weekly payroll of about \$3,500 and was the Chamber's first industrial recruiting success. State Senator W. O. Hake served as Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce during this auspicious undertaking and through the efforts of a well organized committee, the Cigar factory was completed ahead of schedule.

Following the closure of the Cigar factory in 1930 due to technological improvements, clothing manufactures began to locate in Dickson. Red Kap Industries, Henry I. Siegel and others located here employing hundreds of employees. In 1962, TENNSCO Corporation began operations in Dickson. A manufacturer of office equipment and products, the company has grown to employ more than 750 people and maintains five local facilities. The success of TENNSCO and other local employers led to the development of the Dickson's industrial park.

The idea of an industrial park for Dickson was advanced by Chamber President Warren G. Medley in 1957 to the Dickson County Quarterly Court. Property was later acquired in the Colesburg area, just South of Dickson. Industries located there sporadically until the mid-1970s when the County under the leadership of County Executive William D. Field and the City of Dickson under the leadership of Mayor J. Dan Buckner began to plan its further development. Their first success was Parade Magazine – a 250,000 square feet facility employing more than 300 people – in 1977.

Other successes followed and job development in Dickson County reached its highest levels in the mid-1980s with the combined efforts of County Executive Field and Dickson Mayor Tom H. Waychoff.



The William D. Field Industrial Park is located within the city limits of Dickson on the South Central Tennessee Railroad, formerly the Nashville and Tuscaloosa Railroad and only 2 miles from Interstate 40. Transportation advantages continue to direct Dickson's prosperity. The location of Interstate 40, a part of the Eisenhower Interstate Highway System planned in the 1950s and constructed in the 1960s, has had a defining impact on the quality development of Dickson County.

Dickson County almost had an unfair advantage in the planning and construction of Interstate 40. Not only was Dickson native Frank G. Clement serving as Governor of



**Governor Frank G. Clement with his father and mother, Dickson Mayor Robert S. and Mayebelle Clement with President Harry S. Truman at the Governor's Mansion**

Tennessee at the time the Interstate was planned, but Commissioner of Highways William M. Leech, Sr., (1953-59) was from Charlotte and previously had served as Dickson County Judge [Executive] for 16 years. Sam T. Whited (1955-59) of White Bluff was Commissioner of Personnel. Clement's cousin and childhood pal, James A. Weems was Dickson County Judge [Executive]. His father Robert S. Clement was Mayor of Dickson. Furthermore, during the construction period under Governor Buford Ellington, another Charlotte native Charles W. Speight (1967-71) succeeded as Commissioner of Highways. This coordination of leadership at the highest levels of local and state government was a decisive advantage for Dickson County.

Frank Goad Clement was born on June 2, 1920 at the Hotel Halbrook in Dickson which was operated by his grandmother, Belle Goad. A graduate of Dickson High School in 1937, he



**Clement on the campaign trail in 1952**

attended Cumberland College



**Under Governor Frank G. Clement's leadership, school children were given free textbooks for the first time**

in Lebanon for two years and graduated from Vanderbilt University Law School in 1942. Afterwards, he became the country's youngest FBI agent before entering military service. He served as the State Commander of the American Legion in 1949 and announced his candidacy in 1950. He was elected Governor of Tennessee three times

1953-55, 1955-59, and 1963-67) and at age 32 became the youngest Governor in Tennessee history.

During his three terms of office he presided over the organization of the Department of Mental Health, the creation of the state's first speech and hearing center, the beginning of a long-range highway construction project including the Eisenhower Interstate Highway System, initiation of the first state-sponsored industrial recruitment program, and the provision of free textbooks for school children.

On a national level, Governor Clement, who was renowned as an orator, was chosen to deliver the keynote address at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, Illinois. Senator Adlai Stevenson was nominated for President, and the impact of his speech prompted his consideration for the Vice Presidency of the United States.



**Clement giving  
keynote address**

Four were considered for the Vice Presidency in 1956, and three were from Tennessee. In addition to Clement they were Senator Estes Kefauver (TN), Senator Albert Gore, Sr., (TN), and Senator John F. Kennedy (MA). Kefauver was chosen, but the attention given Clement at this time established him as an important player on the national scene.

Politically, Dickson County has produced Governor Frank G. Clement (1953-59, 1963-67), Lieutenant Governor Sterling Brewer of Charlotte (1821-23) and Speaker of the House of Representatives Frank S. Hall of Dickson (1923-25).

Governor Tom C. Rye (1915-19) studied law under his uncle, Thomas C. Morris on the Court Square in Charlotte.

Felix Ives Batson of Cumberland Furnace was a Justice of the Arkansas Supreme Court (1858); and a Representative from Arkansas in the Confederate Congress (1862-65).

The first woman ever elected to the United States Senate, Hattie Ophelia Wyatt Caraway (1931-45, D, Arkansas), a native of Humphreys County, was an 1896 graduate of Dickson Normal College. Her husband, Senator Thaddeus H. Caraway (1921-31) was also a graduate of the 1896 class of Dickson Normal College. Caraway was the first woman to chair a Senate Committee (1933) and the first woman to preside over a meeting of the United States Senate (1943). She became the first woman to sponsor the Equal Rights Amendment and is the 3<sup>rd</sup> honoree in the "Distinguished American" series of postage stamps when a 76 cent stamp was issued by the US



**US Senator  
Hattie Wyatt  
Caraway (D, AR)**

Postal Service on February 21, 2001.



**Anna Belle Clement O'Brien**

Anna Belle Clement O'Brien, a Dickson native, served as Administrative Assistant to Governor Clement (1963-67), and served in the Tennessee House of Representatives (1975-77) and the Tennessee State Senate (1977-97). She was the first woman in Tennessee to Chair the State Senate Education and Transportation Committees and the first woman in Tennessee to Chair the Democratic Caucus and in 1982 was the first Tennessee woman to make a serious challenge for Governor.



**Congressman  
Bob Clement**



**Bob Clement with Present George Bush  
at the White House, September 2002**

Robert N. (Bob) Clement, son of Governor Clement, served as a Tennessee Public Service Commissioner (1973-79), Tennessee Valley Authority Board Member (1979-80) and Congressman from the 5<sup>th</sup> District of Tennessee (1994-2002).

Dickson native Sara Peery Kyle, niece of Governor Clement, also served as a member of the Tennessee Public Service Commission (1995-96) and as a member of the Tennessee Regulatory Authority (1996-Present).

William Loch Cook of Charlotte served as a member of the Tennessee Supreme Court (1927-41). Robert S. Clement of Dickson served as a special Justice on the Tennessee Supreme Court (196\_- ; 196\_-6\_). William M. Leech, Sr. of Charlotte served as a special Justice on the Tennessee Supreme Court (1973-74). Charlotte native William M. Leech, Jr. served as Tennessee Attorney General (1978-84). Thomas T. Woodall has served as a Judge on the Tennessee Circuit Court of Appeals since December 4, 1996.

It is worth noting, that when Dickson County Executive William D. Field (1970-97) retired, he was the longest serving executive in the United States.

The depression brought despair to our community just as it did to our entire nation. Yet, several important community assets were outgrowths of that dismal time. In 1931, the Dickson Women's Club created the Dickson County Public Library to give the community hope at a time there seemed to be very little. The War Memorial Building was built on the



**Dickson County Public Library  
(1973-2002)**

site of the former Courthouse (1899-1927), as a tribute for the lives that were given by Dickson County soldiers during World War I and was dedicated in 1933. The Library was then moved from the basement of the First Baptist Church to the War Memorial Building, where it remained until 1973 when a new facility was constructed on Hunt Street for the Library.

In 2002, the Library moved to its present location at 206 Henslee Drive, Dickson, in a 22,000 square foot facility located on 4.5 acres of land.

In 1934, the construction of Montgomery Bell Park was begun as a federal project. The Park was constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a part of FDR's alphabet soup of programs that were designed to give young men useful employment that consequently produced an important community asset.



**Dickson County Public Library opened in 2002 at 206 Henslee Drive**

The Park encompasses approximately 3,892 acres that were acquired from the estate of Iron Master Epps Jackson and others. Contained within the boundaries of the Park is the site of the birth of the Cumberland Presbytery in 1810. After it was completed, the State of Tennessee took the facility over and opened Montgomery Bell State Park and added an Inn in 1951. The Inn was demolished and a new 120 room Inn and Convention Center was opened in 1998. The Frank G. Clement Golf Course was opened in the 1970s. Montgomery Bell State Park is one of the most visited State Parks in Tennessee.



**CCC Memorial at Montgomery Bell**

Medical services have always been plentiful in Dickson County – even from its earliest times. One of the most dangerous professions in the early 1800s was to be associated with the Iron Industry. Cumberland Furnace often had as many as 7 doctors working at the furnace. The numerous other furnaces and forges located around the county ensured that medical care was nearby. Dr. W. A. Bell, Sr., Dr. W. A. Bell, Jr., Dr. John D. Slayden, Dr. Eliza Cunningham, Dr. T. B. Loggins and Dr. Mary Baxter Cook were all prominent physicians from the North side of Dickson County. Cook was in Vanderbilt Medical School's first class that graduated women.

In Dickson, Dr. J. T. Henslee was the first prominent physician who finally had to give up his practice because of his vast business interests in the early development of Dickson. He was soon followed by Dr. W. J. Sugg who practiced in Dickson from 1897 until 1963 when he retired at the age of 93.



**Dr. W. J. Sugg in the Baker Building on Dickson's Main St**

Dr. W. A. Moody practiced for 40 years in Charlotte and retired in Tennessee City where Drs. William Bray and Oscar Moody had successful practices. Dr. W. C. Charlton began his practice in White Bluff in 1869.

In the 1940s, Dr. L. C. Jackson began a practice of medicine in a one-room medical clinic on the second floor of a retail establishment on Dickson's Main Street. Soon afterwards, his brothers, Drs. William and Jimmy Jackson joined him in caring for the community's medical needs. In 1958, the Jackson brothers built Goodlark Hospital, organized as a not-for-profit public benefit trust. The hospital grew to its current 176-bed status that offers



**Dr. J. T. Jackson**

medical and surgical care, obstetrics, gynecology, skilled nursing services and 24-hour emergency services and outpatient care.



**Horizon Medical Center, formerly Goodlark Hospital**

In 1995, the hospital sold to Columbia/HCA for \$103,000,000.

As a non-profit organization, the proceeds from the sale were converted into The Jackson Foundation, Inc. which operates the Renaissance Center, a fine arts and technology learning center unlike any other in the country. The Renaissance Center opened in 1999.



**The Renaissance Center**



**GreyStone Golf Club**

Signs of Dickson's emerging prominence as an outstanding place to live are evidenced by the continued improvements at Montgomery Bell State Park, the opening of the Renaissance Center in 1999, the development of GreyStone Golf Club that opened September 11, 1998, the Speyer family's gift of TENNSCO Softball Park



and TENNSCO Community Center, the opening of Thunder Alley in 2002, a bowling and recreational complex, and the development of the Roxy Theater, also opened in 2002. The City of Dickson constructed Holland Park in 2002 across from the Railroad Depot in Downtown Dickson from proceeds of a bequeath from Blanche Holland to construct a new park.



**Holland Park is located across from the Depot and next to the Hotel Halbrook**



The Community Foundation for Dickson County was organized in December 1999 with an initial \$6,000. and in 2002 is completing its first \$500,000. endowment campaign to create a permanent fund for the future of Dickson County committed to "Matching Generosity with Needs". The Speyer/TENNSCO Donor Advised Fund offered a \$250,000. match for funds raised. Since coming to Dickson in 1962, the Speyers and TENNSCO have been philanthropic leaders.



Commercial, residential, industrial, recreational and civic growths are working in harmony to create a desirable place to live. As the County's 200<sup>th</sup> birthday approaches, its remarkable heritage makes it incumbent upon the County's leaders to recognize the distinct value of each of the six incorporated municipalities and the numerous other communities that make Dickson County such a pleasant place to live.

Our heritage is one to celebrate – *for heritage is what has been...but it is also...what can be!*

No examination of the history of Dickson County is possible without consulting the extensive research and writings of Dr. Robert E. Corlew, Jr. and Mr. George E. Jackson. Our county will never be able to compliment the value of their important work. Much of what we know about our county's history has been collected, evaluated and interpreted by these distinguished scholars. But more importantly, they were willing to share their insights with us through their writings and lectures and have helped to give us our own sense of place.

Dr. Corlew is the author of *A History of Dickson County* and Mr. Jackson is the author of *Cumberland Furnace – A Frontier Iron Plantation*.

