

GRUNDY COUNTY TO 1900  
COMPILED BY GLEN PERKINS

Mary Ellen + Tom  
Patton

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

All the land within the present boundaries of Tennessee was part of the original grant to the British colony of North Carolina. North Carolina had little interest in its territory west of the Smokies, however, which disinterest prompted settlers in the area to form their own government. In 1784 the western territory organized itself into the new State of Franklin. North Carolina had planned to cede the district to the newly independent United States anyway, but about the time the State of Franklin was organized the State of North Carolina changed its mind.<sup>1</sup>

In order to appease the western settlers, North Carolina established the Washington District. Washington County, as the District became known, included nearly all of the present State of Tennessee. The Franklin government adopted a constitution anyway, and informed North Carolina that Franklin was a "free and independent state."<sup>2</sup>

The Federal Government threw a wrench in Franklin's works in 1787 when it included a clause in the new Constitution providing that no State could be divided without its consent.<sup>3</sup> North Carolina did consent to be divided in 1790, but the State of Franklin had silently faded away. The 1790 cession created the Tennessee Territory, and Tennessee achieved statehood in 1796.<sup>4</sup>

Though the State of Franklin, the Washington District, and the Tennessee Territory had all included what is now Grundy County, it was not until 1794 that the Nickajack Expedition opened the region up for settlement. The Expedition, indian fighters on their way to Chattanooga, passed along a trail known as the Chickamauga Trace. This trail followed roughly the path of the present State Highway 56 through Grundy County, entering up the mountain through Beersheba Springs, and exiting

Mary Ellen Patton

near Tracy City.<sup>5</sup> Except for scattered hunters and traders, these were probably the first white men in Grundy County. Their defeat of the Chickamaugas made the area safe for settlement.

When Warren County was erected in 1807, most of what is now Grundy County was included within its boundaries.<sup>6</sup> Much of Warren County's mountain land was bought up by William Dugan in 1824, the same year he arrived from North Carolina.<sup>7</sup> At the time Dugan bought the mountain land there was nothing of much value on it; no settlements, no known riches. Most people preferred to settle in the valley where there were other people, and no-one paid much attention to the mountain until 1833.


1833- Beersheba Porter Cain, wife of John Cain from McMinnville, wandered up the mountain one day while her husband was discussing business with William Dugan at the foot of the mountain. Beersheba and her servants discovered a spring which she was quick to fancy had therapeutic properties. She returned again and again, bringing friends along who might enjoy the health-giving waters. It quickly became a popular place with the "society-women" of McMinnville.<sup>8</sup>

1839- William Dugan authorized a turnpike road to be built across the mountain. The road was to originate at his place near the foot of the mountain. From there, it was to pass over the mountain by way of "Beersheba's Springs," and thence on, descending the mountain at Ross's Landing.<sup>9</sup>

Beersheba Springs must have acquired some population by this time and was becoming a popular resort, for the Beersheba Springs Company was organized and incorporated

by the Tennessee General Assembly.<sup>11</sup> At some time prior to this, William Dugan had deeded some of his mountain land to several McMinnville men. John Cain received a parcel along with Alfred Paine, Samuel Edmondson, George R. Smartt, and William (Buck) White. The land was deeded with the stipulation that the spring discovered by Mrs. Cain would be promoted for "all who wish to enjoy" its waters. The plan of the Beersheba Springs Company involved only the operation of a tavern.<sup>12</sup>

1840- Felix Grundy died. Though he may never have set foot within the boundaries of the county which bears his name, he is definitely a part of its history. Felix Grundy was a lawyer, judge, and U.S. Senator from 1829 to 1838. At one time he served as Attorney General of the United States. At his death, six of his sons-in-law inherited 100,000 acres of mountain land. Two of these were John M. Bass and Jacob McCavock.<sup>13</sup>

 1844- Grundy County was created by an act of the Tennessee Legislature. The new county combined sections of Coffee and Warren Counties. Later, a small section of Marion County would be added. William Dugan and Adrian Northcutt - from the Warren County section -, and John Burrows and Alfred Broley - from the Coffee County section -, were appointed by the legislature to serve as commissioners to organize the new county.

In July, the first election was held. (See Appendix A.) In August, the Grundy County Quarterly Court met for the first time. (See Appendix B.) The Court met at Beersheba Springs for its first session. Beginning with the second session, the court was held at the home of Jesse Wooten, where it continued to meet for the next four years.<sup>14</sup> The Wooten place was located about three miles north of Altamont.

- 1848- In October the County seat was established at Altamont. The County Court met at the David Ritchie home until a new courthouse could be built.<sup>15</sup> The Ritchie residence is a large building constructed of roughly hewn logs. At the time of this writing it sits behind the Fanny Moffet manor home, awaiting restoration.
- 1850- Court was held for the first time in the new courthouse in Altamont. The new courthouse was a frame building constructed of yellow pine. Richard Bradford was serving as chairman of the County Court.<sup>17</sup>
- 1851- John Moffat, an international temperance movement leader, embarked from Canada on an extensive tour of the United States. It may have been on this tour that he first came to the mountain.<sup>18</sup>
- 1854- John Armfield came to Beersheba Springs. He, before he came, had been one of the most successful slave traders in the country. After getting out of the slave business in 1836, he had wandered around the south with nothing to do except spend his money. When Mr. Armfield found Beersheba Springs, he bought the hotel and 1500 acres of land from R. H. Robards of Memphis, and John H. French of McMinnville for \$3,750.00. He paid another \$1,200.00 for William White's double-coiled red cedar log residence.
- Armfield began improving his property immediately. He began building 20 new residences for some of his wealthy friends. The homes would be given to them with the stipulations that no boarders could be kept, no groceries sold, and no alcoholic beverages sold or given away. He also put his slaves to work improving the road from the foot of the mountain to Altamont.<sup>19</sup>

1855- An important branch of the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad was completed which would help provide Nashville with a regular and cheap supply of coal. The branch line ran up the mountain from Cowan, through Sewanee, and into the coal mines of the Sewanee Mining Company near Tracy City.<sup>20</sup> Colonel A. S. Colyar and eastern industrialist Samuel F. Tracy had been successful in getting the branch line built so that they could easily transport the "excellent" coal from the soon-to-be-famous sewanee seam.<sup>21</sup>

Ben Cagle moved to Beersheba Springs from the Irving College community at the foot of the mountain in order to take the foreman's job on John Armfield's staff. Cagle would become a popular personality in Beersheba Springs, and stay with his beloved boss until the day he died. He lies buried in Beersheba, next to Armfield.<sup>22</sup>

1857- The first "stone coal" in the south was mined in Tracy City. At first, there was absolutely no market for the fuel, because people were slow to believe that a "stone" would burn. In order to induce the operators of railroad engines, stationary engines, blacksmiths and home-owners to buy the coal, the Sewanee Mining Company was offering to reimburse customers for the expense of coal grates if the coal didn't work, and to pay the cost of conversion back to wood or charcoal.<sup>23</sup>

Samuel F. Tracy offered 5,000 acres of his land in Franklin County for the establishment of a new university. He made the offer to friends of his living in Beersheba Springs, who had long talked of starting a new "University of the South." Two of these were: James H. Ctey, Episcopal Bishop of Louisiana and the originator of the dream; and Leonidas Folk, Episcopal Bishop of Tennessee. Ctey and Folk occupied two of the twenty cottages that Arm-

field had built in Beersheba Springs. Armfield pledged the University \$25.000 a year for the rest of his life.

By this year, the hotel at Beersheba had been completed and several of the cottages were occupied. A site was selected for an Episcopal Church which was never built.<sup>24</sup>

An interesting advertisement in the Nashville Banner stated the attractions offered at the Beersheba Springs resort: a new hotel, a table with all the delicacies of the season, a good bowling alley, and a fine ball-room supplied with music. There was no saloon, gambling was prohibited, and no gambler need apply for rooms. The rate was \$2.00 a day or \$35.00 a month with no charge for light or fire. It was recommended that guests take the train to McMinnville where they would find a stagecoach for Beersheba.<sup>25</sup> The stage fare from McMinnville was \$2.00, with each passenger being allowed 60 pounds of baggage.<sup>26</sup>

M. A. Price ran the stage to Beersheba. He also was responsible for the livery at Beersheba. In exchange for \$1.00, his agreement to keep the buggies and saddle horses for a rate not more than that charged at Nashville, and his responsibility of putting the stage on the road, he was leased lot #5 at Beersheba Springs.<sup>27</sup>

1858- By this year all twenty of the Armfield cottages had been completed, and no two of them were alike. The hotel was at its best with as many as 400 guests being entertained at one time. The chef at the hotel and all the servants were French, and a French band from New Orleans played music for dancing. It was the custom for the band to play for the stagecoach coming up the mountain, bringing mail and passengers. When the horses stopped to rest, the coachman sounded his horn one time for each passenger.<sup>28</sup>

1859- The Beersheba Springs Company was granted a charter by the Tennessee General Assembly with the following men named as incorporators: John M. Bass, Joseph H. Williams, C. G. Dahlgren, Oliver J. Morgan, Minor Kenner, Sterling Cockrill, Alexander Barrow, A. Hamilton Folk, Josiah Garrett, Benjamin Johnson, John Waters, Charles W. Phillips, Lucius J. Polk, and John Scarborough who became the treasurer.<sup>29</sup>

1860- The census showed that John Armfield had more slaves than anyone else in the county. He owned 32.<sup>30</sup>

1861- The Civil War was getting started. Grundy County had both Federal and Confederate sympathisers. Most of the county was probably of the Confederate persuasion, but Beersheba Springs was known as a Union camp, with the Confederates there being not so numerous.<sup>31</sup>

Some people, such as Bishop James H. Otey, could not arouse sympathy for either side. He was writing letters from Beersheba which showed the horrors the war was causing in his soul.

Another Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Leonidas Polk, was preparing himself for the duties of a Confederate General. On July 4 he replaced Gideon J. Pillow as the leader of Tennessee's Armies.<sup>32</sup>

1862- On May 29 Captain W. C. Kain's Tennessee Light Artillery Company left Chattanooga for Winchester to join Colonel Starnes' 4th Tennessee Cavalry, and made connection with Starnes at Altamont. An intended rendezvous with other Confederate forces failed to materialize, and Starnes stayed around Altamont for two days flanked by a Federal force too large for him to handle. After having some skirmishes with outlying bands, Kain's Battery left Altamont for Kingston.<sup>33</sup>

Beersheba Springs by this time had assumed the role of a refuge where people of culture could escape the tensions of the war. Governor Harris, Judge Bromfield Ridley and other luminaries found repose there.

Sewing, knitting, weaving and cooking went on in the Armfield Cottage for the benefit of Lee's soldiers and the sick in the hospitals. The cottage was turned into a hotel for all who would come. Captain Bromfield Ridley wrote in his diary that he would sometimes watch the passing of lines of blue and gray uniforms along the valley road, or crossing the mountain by way of Beersheba.

When Forrest passed through Beersheba on his way back from his raid on Murfreesboro, Mrs. Armfield had bags of coffee opened and gave a package to each soldier as he passed.<sup>34</sup>

1863- Companies "D", "E", and "F" were organized on December 9 in Tracy City and Nashville.<sup>35</sup>

1864- Captain Stephen P. Tipton's company, consisting of one officer and 73 men, unarmed except for half a dozen squirrel rifles and not mounted, was part of the garrison at Tracy City when it was attacked by Bledsoe. Just prior to the attack, Tipton was surprised at his home in Altamont, where he was shot down when he came to his door to answer a hail. Tipton was shown on a muster roll dated February 24 at Nashville. The roll showed Tipton to be a 2nd Lieutenant in James H. Shannon's Company "E", 1st Regiment, Independent Vidette Cavalry. This outfit consisted of 91 officers and enlisted men, nearly all of whom had enlisted at Altamont, and had been mustered at Tracy City in December of 1863.<sup>36</sup>

General Leonidas Polk was killed at Pine Mountain, Alabama. His death was a blow to Confederate morale.

Colonel William B. Stokes reported numerous engagements around Beersheba during February and March.<sup>37</sup>



1865- Things on the mountain seemed to have hit rock-bottom. Most of the patrons of the resort in Beersheba Springs were either dead or bankrupt. Armfield was forced to repossess the cottages he had built for his now penniless friends. He sold out his Beersheba holdings to John M. Bass, including the hotel.<sup>38</sup>

1867- Captain E. H. Plumacher was sent by the Department of Emigration of Switzerland to the United States to look for a suitable place for Swiss colonization. President Andrew Johnson asked him to look at Tennessee before he made up his mind.<sup>39</sup>

John Armfield was the only citizen in Grundy County to pay a luxury tax. He reported ownership of one gold watch. Before the war, taxes were paid on 17 gold watches, 18 carriages, and 12 pieces of jewelry.<sup>40</sup>

1869- Captain Plumacher chose the final location for his colony of Swiss immigrants.<sup>41</sup> Peter Staub, a Swiss Businessman living in Knoxville, paid \$.40 to \$.90 per acre for the land in tracts as large as 6,000 acres and plots as small as 100 acres.<sup>42</sup> The land was located a few miles southeast of Altamont.

The first 100 Swiss arrived in Tennessee. They formed a colony which they named "Grütli" (Cruetli), after the Canton in Switzerland from which they had come.<sup>44</sup> They found one log cabin and thousands of trees on the uncleared land. They knew the winter would be hard, and hard it was.

1870- John Moffat bought 1,146 1/3 acres of unbroken land on the southern edge of Grundy County, and settled there in May with his wife and children. The town of Moffat's

Station (later, Monteagle), would soon start growing around him. Moffat was retiring from his travels as a leader of the temperance movement after a severe financial loss in Ohio.<sup>45</sup>

The Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad made an agreement with the State of Tennessee for the lease of 100 State prisoners to be used in the coal mines around Tracy City. The agreement called for the company to pay \$1.00 per man per day to the State and to provide facilities for keeping the prisoners. The State, in return, would furnish the convicts with food and clothing.<sup>46</sup>

1871- John Armfield died and was buried near his home in Beersheba Springs.<sup>47</sup>

1873- John Moffat donated 50 acres of land near his home for the establishment of Fairmount Female College. The college was organized and started receiving students soon thereafter.<sup>48</sup> Moffat was devoted to the cause of education, and must have thought there were too few higher education institutions for women. At the time, the University of the South was an all-male institution.

120 open ovens which would convert coal into coke were constructed in the vicinity of Tracy City. The Tennessee Coal and Railroad Company had already discovered that much of the coal they had been throwing away was suitable for the purpose of making iron. Mr. S. E. Jones, who was in charge of the machine shops in Tracy City, had told Colonel Colyar, President of the company, and A. M. Shook, who was handling things, that he could construct an oven which would convert the coal for about \$3,000. The type ovens used in the iron towns

of the north would have cost the company between \$125,000 and \$200,000; a sum which they could not afford to pay. Mr. Jones' crude furnace was fired up and very shortly fell to the ground. Before it fell, though, some iron had been made- the first coke-iron in the south. The 120 ovens constructed in 1873 were of the type Mr. Jones had improvised.<sup>50</sup>

1876- The State of Tennessee chartered "The Moffat Normal and Collegiate Institute." This school was one of John Moffat's pet dreams, and was intended to be a place where families of limited means could send their children to receive a higher education. Moffat donated one building and some land but, probably due to a lack of donated capital, the school never got off the ground.<sup>51</sup>

1882- The Sunday School Assembly of the South had been looking for a site for a "southern Chataqua," a copy of the famous Chataqua Assembly in New York State.<sup>52</sup> After looking at sites in Tullahoma, Lookout Mountain, King's Mountain, N. C., and Atlanta, the group chose to establish its Sunday School Assembly Grounds in Mont-eagle. John Moffat's contribution of the land for the Assembly, and his eloquent and persuasive speech to the Assembly Association, contributed greatly to their decision. The Assembly still functions as a quasi-religious resort on the original site.<sup>53</sup>

The original pine courthouse in Altamont was destroyed by fire.<sup>54</sup>

1883- The Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad Company had 130 more of Mr. Jones' "beehive" coke ovens constructed near the Tracy City mines.<sup>55</sup>

- 1884- A five year lease agreement between the Tennessee Iron, Coal, and Railroad Company and the State of Tennessee for the use of State prisoners was signed. The Company agreed to pay the State \$101,000 per year for the use of convicts to work in the coal mines. This contract was renewed a few times, and finally expired in 1895.<sup>56</sup>
- 1886- John Moffat died on Christmas Day.<sup>57</sup>
- 1890- The English language became the only language taught in the Swiss school at Gruetli. The students in the school had been used to using either English or German.<sup>58</sup>
- 1890- The practice of leasing convicts to the coal mine operators in Tracy City and to others netted the State \$771,400.<sup>59</sup>
- 1891- The regular coal miners were objecting vigorously to the convicts taking their jobs away. The company could work convicts much more cheaply than they could pay normal wages, and had no intention of letting the convicts go back to prison.
- The miners who did work were paid in "scrip," which had to be spent in the company store, or discounted anywhere else. They were forced to sign contracts pledging allegiance to the officials of the company and promising not to strike.<sup>60</sup>
- 1892- In July, outbreaks occurred at the Tracy City mines. Governor Buchanan vacillated, but offered rewards for the apprehension and conviction of the leaders of the uprising. Some miners were arrested, but few convicted.<sup>61</sup> Because of the uprising, however, the convict laborers were temporarily removed.<sup>62</sup>

1894- Martin Marugg took over the defunct "Tracy City News," and started "Mrs. Grundy." His weekly newspaper was published under that name until sometime around 1930,<sup>63</sup> and is remembered as the most popular newspaper ever sold in Grundy County.

The town of Tracy City discussed and "'cussed" the question of incorporation.

Wages of coal miners were cut 20 per cent. About 200 citizens, knowing that there would probably be a strike, met to consider what they should do when it came. The convict miners mutinied in August, killing a deputy warden and one of themselves.<sup>64</sup>

1895- About 50 convict miners were removed from Tracy City in September, in the face of an impending conflagration. By November, things had cooled down some, and 75 convicts were brought in to take the place of the 50.<sup>65</sup> In December the contract between the State and the mine operators ran out, and the convict miners were removed permanently.<sup>66</sup>

Martin Marugg established the Dixie Telephone Company, with a line running between Tracy City and Altamont.<sup>67</sup>

1896- The last of the convict miners leave Tracy City.<sup>68</sup> The regular miners called a strike in December.<sup>69</sup>

1897- The coal miners returned to work in January. A vegetable canning factory began operating in Tracy City.<sup>70</sup>

1898- The coal miners struck again in April. The strike was settled by October. The coke ovens near Tracy City had to shut down during the strike.

The canning factory went into receivership.

The Dixie Telephone Company extended their line to McMinnville.<sup>71</sup>

1900- By the turn of the century the Swiss colony at Gruetli was dissipating. The lack of opportunities in Grundy County (a condition which still persists) was forcing the Swiss toward brighter horizons. Some of them moved to Tracy City to go into business there; others moved to Nashville or Chattanooga and points beyond.

The resort at Beersheba Springs was in the midst of a revival. The devastation of the southern economy attributed to the Civil War was replaced by a boom, and resorts such as the one at Beersheba Springs regained some of their old popularity.

Altamont had a new courthouse begun in 1898, and was (and is) a quiet, peaceful town.

Monteagle thrived on the "summer-folk" who spent their money there. In Monteagle, as well as Beersheba Springs, the local population was dependent on private wealth for its economic well-being. Tracy City, in contrast, was in the total control of the Mining Company.

ADDITIONS- Things I Left Out

In 1844 the Tennessee legislature established a branch penitentiary at Tracy City. An agreement was signed with the Tennessee Iron, Coal, and Railroad Company for the leasing of prisoners to work in the coal mines.<sup>72</sup>

Bishop James Hervey Otey died in 1863.<sup>73</sup>

APPENDIX (A)

In the July 6, 1844 election, the following men took office:

Philip Roberts----- Sheriff  
Reuben Webb----- County Court Clerk  
Abraham Jones----- Registrar  
John Burrows----- Trustee

Presumably, the following magistrates were also elected on this date:

Adrian Northcutt  
John Fults  
William Dugan  
Ambrose Killian  
Robert Tate  
Isaac Campbell  
Stephen M. Griswold  
James Lockhart  
John Burrows  
Thomas Warren  
Daniel Sain