

History
Of
Washington County
Tennessee
1988



...the time that the Dutch House, or Great Hall, was built. In 1961, an extensive building project, including renovation of the old building and the addition of new space, was completed and dedicated.

In 1971, St. John's had its first deacon. There have been seven ordinations at St. John's - four to the priesthood and three to the diaconate. The Reverend William A. Jones, Jr., rector from 1972 to 1975, is now the Bishop of Missouri.

As of 1987, the congregation numbered approximately 688 baptized members and 564 communicants in good standing. Rectors and priests in charge of St. John's include the Reverend Messrs. Samuel Ringgold (1885), Alexander C. Killeffer (1885-1895), Russell K. Smith (1900-1902), William H. Osborne (1905-1911), Lyttleton E. Hubbard (1911-1914), W. Aimison Jonnard (1914-1922), Harry F. Keller (1922-1949), Howard McMueller (1949-1958), Elmer M. Boykin (1958-1965), Donald G. L. Henning (1965-1966), James M. Coleman (1966-1971), William A. Jones, Jr. (1972-1975), C. Christopher Clements (1975-1985), and Don E. Johnson (1986-). - contributed by St. John's Episcopal Church



The site of the Old Dutch Meeting House (Immanuel Lutheran Church) on B. Chase Road. A cemetery remains at this site.

Lutheran

The history of the Lutheran denomination in Washington County began when families of German descent came from Virginia. Many of these settlers had previously lived in Pennsylvania or were descended from ancestors there. The first Lutheran church of record in the county was Immanuel Lutheran Church, also called the Old Dutch Meeting House, located near the Nolichucky River between Cherokee Baptist Church and the New Victory community. The date of organization for the church is not known. The first clear reference to Immanuel Lutheran Church was in 1805, when a deed was executed from Henry Miller to the "congregations of the Lutheran and Presbyterian Dutch" for one acre and forty poles of land to be used "for a Dutch church." Witnesses to this deed were Conrod Keicher and Henry Slyger. One of the first ministers was Philip Henkel, who preached in both German and English. In 1811, the church reported to the North Carolina Synod, and in 1820 became a charter member of the Tennessee Synod. In 1827 two delegates from Washington County to the Lutheran Tennessee Synod were Jacob Good and Michael Hoyl; it is believed that they were from the Old Dutch Meeting House's congregation. Church records were written in German script and the location of the original records is not known. Available information covers the period from 1816 to 1835 and is incomplete, partially because not all names could be translated. The church apparently ceased to exist about 1870. The church building has been gone for many years, and the old cemetery that was used by the congregation is now covered with dense undergrowth. After the church ceased to operate, some members may have moved to the Luther Zion Church, which was built in 1849, or to Lutheran churches in nearby Greene County. Much of the available information on the Old Dutch Meeting House has survived only because of the efforts of two well-known local historians, the late Mary Hardin McCown and the late Charles M. Bennett.

Variations in the spelling of proper names and surnames characterize the records. This may be due to the difficulty translators had in reading the German script or to efforts of the original record-keepers who may have tried to Americanize German names. For example, Kyker is spelled as Keicher, Kiker, and Keyker; Bottles as Bottels, Bartles, and Bortles; Ingle as Angel, Ingol, and Angrl; Hartsell as Hartsel, Hartzell, Heartsell, and Hatsol; Slyger as Slygar, Sliger, and Schleiger; Lineberger as Lainbouser; Wattenbarger as Wattenberger, Wintredbarger, and Wintrubarger; Lobwasser as Lob-

wazzer and Loberwater. Critselous is spelled at least five different ways. The names of families who between 1816 and 1835 were communicants of the Old Dutch Meeting House are given below:

Conrad and Elizabeth Lobwasser; Nelson and Elizabeth Mitchell; Adam and Elizabeth May; Daniel and Luisy Wood; Philip and Catherine Boland; Samuel and Delila Early; Adam and Magdalene Wattenbarger; Jeremiah and Susannah Boid; Samuel and Elizabeth Keplinger; George and Mary Swingle; Nicholas and Catherine Lineberger; William and Mary Bottles; George and Susannah Walter; John and Barbara Link; John and Catherine Slagle; Jacob and Mary Linebarger; William and Susannah Finchum; Samuel and Lusinda Creselous; Henry and Catherine Slyger; John and Elizabeth Keicher; John and Katherine Starmer; Jacob and Elizabeth Hedrick; Joseph and Jonna Keyker; Cyrus and Maria Broil; Elias and Elizabeth Bowman; George and Anna Marie Zimmle; Jacob and Mary Keplinger; Conrad and Maria Keicher; Daniel and Mariar Broil; Cassimor and Marya May; John and Magdelene Schleiger.

Surnames of other individuals are: Delaney, Shufford, Findly, Bedsal, Hammon/Harmon, Sharfy, Colyar, Good, Greer/Green, Ireland, and Templin.

A" old log church built in 1811, known as Union Church, was located on a site beside the present U.S. Highway 11E between Jonesborough and Lime- to, e. As Lutheran families moved to that area they probably used that church for Lutheran services, since they erected Luther Zion church in 1849 on the same site. In 1852 Fyatt Armentrout donated land nearby for a cemetery. The church building still stands, a one-room, oblong building painted white. The building was heated with two stoves, using wood for fuel; the stoves were made in Telford, Tennessee, and one is now in the Washington County museum in Jonesborough. A" early member of the church was Frederick Armentrout, descendant of Anna Elizabeth Armentrout (Ermentraud) who with her six sons came to America on the ship Samuel in 1759. They first settled in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, but later moved to Augusta County, Virginia, where they assisted in erecting Peaked Mountain Church. In 1839 Frederick Armentrout came to Washington County, Tennessee with his wife and ten of their twelve children, buying 500 acres of land on Big Limestone Creek near Luther Zion Church. Jacob Sellers with his wife, Priscilla Armentrout, and their six children followed Frederick to Tennessee and became members of Luther Zion church. Families connected with the church in the late 1800's and early 1900's were the Propst family of Limestone and the Crumley family of the Telford area. From about 1910 the membership declined until in April 1982 only two members were left. On August 15, 1982, the final worship service was held and the church ceased to exist as a Lutheran church. The building and grounds were sold by church officials soon thereafter.



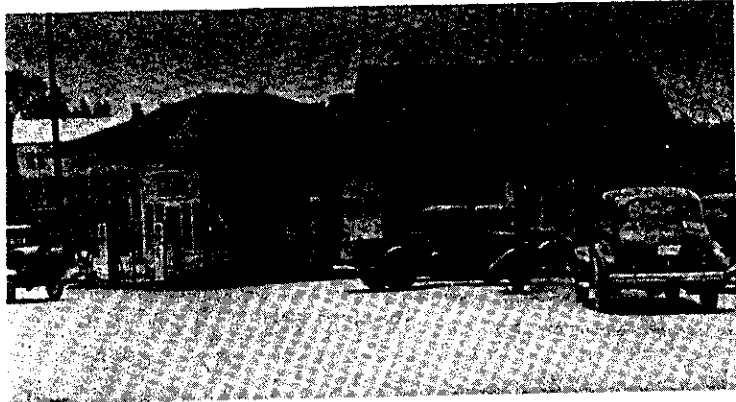
Luther Zion Church.

In 1957 Our Savior Lutheran Church, located on Sunset Drive in Johnson City, was organized. In 1955 Dr. John Bennetch began to hold services with only three families present, meeting in the assembly room of the Pet Dairy Office building and still later in the basement of the Home Federal Savings and Loan Building. There were fifty-one charter members of the church. In 1960 they purchased the site of the present church building, using two small buildings on the property until the church was erected. The church was dedicated in 1965. By the tenth anniversary over 100 persons had been confirmed and over two hundred had been on the rolls. The building was expanded in 1969 and again in 1974. By 1982 the membership had increased to 475 members. In some years the church had

1960
liam
was:
Am
R. C
A
a ch
192
Chu
Joh
he
the
Bet
of t
by
chu
gre
tior
(19
con
Av
chu
Ref
dee
Sav

I
"C
mc
Fr
pa
mc
He
in
Ar
vit
m

ne
ric
re
m
"2
of
th
of
w
st
bi
N

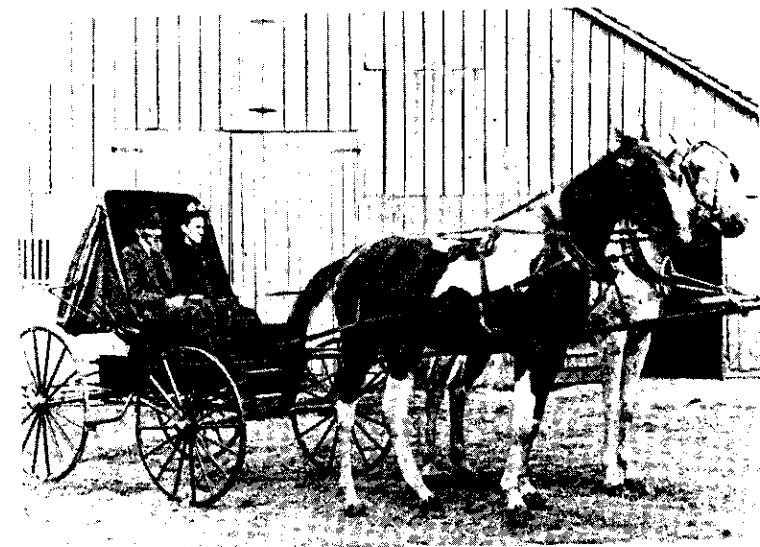


The Yeager service station at Limestone was typical of many such stations throughout the county after the advent of the automobile. (Photograph courtesy of Elva Tyree)

county has participated in the building of more than fifty bridges. All major bridges have been replaced. The county must furnish 29% of the cost of bridges on federal highways and 25% of the cost of the bridges on state roads, but the cost to be supplied by the county for the bridges on state roads may be supplied in kind.

Road building in Washington County is costly because of the many hills, the limestone ledges and projections, and the many streams that must be bridged. In 1987 the county spent almost three million dollars on its road building and maintenance. In spite of the fact that Washington County is outstanding among the counties of Tennessee for its fine road system, much remains to be done. Many roads need to be widened, curves need to be straightened, and narrow bridges need to be replaced. The Washington County Highway Department, the Washington County Commissioners, the Planning Office of Upper East Tennessee, and the Washington County Regional Planning Commission are working together to plan even better roads for the future. - contributed by Mary Sue Going and James T. Dykes

References: Lay, Elery A. *An Industrial and Commercial History of the Tri-Cities in Tennessee-Virginia*; Writings of Samuel Cole Williams; Helen Kirkpatrick Monroe; Upper East Tennessee Planning Office; Washington County Regional Land Commission. *Land Use Plan*; Finchum, George, *Washington County Court 1796-1836*; Washington County Tax Records, Jack Daniels, Trustee; Johnny Deakins, Washington County Highway Superintendent; John Conley, Assistant Washington Highway Superintendent; Legislative Petitions, Tennessee State Library and Archives.



Charles F. Decker, Sr. and wife using a common form of transportation, circa 1900. (Photograph courtesy of Mildred Decker)

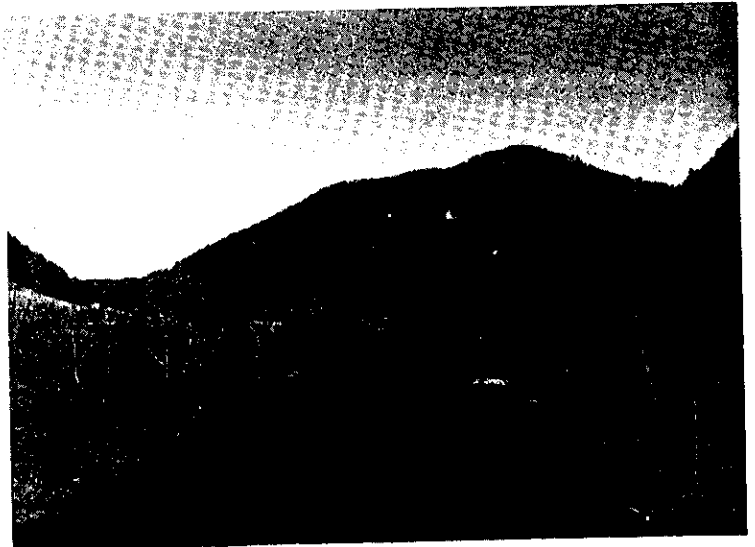
River Transportation

How and where to cross rivers had to be decided by settlers in order to reach the land which they had purchased or that which they hoped to buy. The rivers in Washington County were not large, but in some places they were deep and narrow; in other places they were wide, but so shallow that the rocks of the river bed could be easily seen, with many projecting above the surface of the water. In the deeper places, banks were often too steep for landing places and the rocky river beds of the shallow places made it difficult, if not impossible, to find sure footing for men or horses. In addition, the depth of the water shifted in various places from time to time as the current moved the sand and silt of the river bottom. When a good place to cross a river was found, the trail to that place soon became a road.

Bridges could not at first be built due to the limited manpower and crude tools available. The need for getting people, goods, and animals across the

streams resulted in the use of rafts or flatboats. A settler owning land at a good crossing place soon found that by building a boat and charging a toll he could help travelers and at the same time make a profit as ferryman. Ferries were a necessity until bridges could be built. In Washington County the county court had authority to approve the establishment or the discontinuance of a ferry and also to fix the amount of toll. George A. Finchum in his thesis, *Washington County Court 1796-1836*, states: "In November 1796 G. DeVault was given leave to keep a ferry on the Watauga at John Bean's old plantation. Whether this ferry was established is doubtful because on May 5, 1800, John Carter presented a petition to the court and requested permission to establish a ferry on the Watauga River about half a mile above Bean's Ford together with the necessary road to pass at said ferry. Not until 1828 did the county grant permission to operate another ferry. In that year the justices permitted William Brown to keep a ferry on the Nolichucky at a place called "Brown's Ferry" and established the following tolls:

Single man and horse, \$0.12 1/2; Single man, 0.06 1/4; Loose horses and cattle, 0.01; Hogs, 0.00 1/4; Two-wheeled carriages, 0.25; Four-wheeled carriages, 0.50".



The Nolichucky River was used during much of the Nineteenth Century by many Washington Countians to transport their products downriver to Knoxville and beyond.

In 1829 a petition from Washington County was presented to the Tennessee legislature requesting that a ferry be established on the Nolichucky River "at what is commonly called Waddell's or the Deep Ford." The reasons given were that this was the point of crossing for the public road between Warm Springs, North Carolina and Abingdon, Virginia, and that it was at times impossible to ford the river at that location. Among those signing the petition were Michael Copp, William Wilson, Richard Gray, Seth Waddell, David Shields, Henry Richard, Adam Broyles, Isaac Broyles, Jonathan Prather, Jacob Copp, John Winkler, Nathan Gann, William Baker and William Patton.

Until 1858 Washington County was almost completely dependent for merchandise or items not produced locally upon overland trade with the eastern cities of Philadelphia, Richmond and Baltimore. Goods were brought by wagons pulled by six-horse teams across the mountains and down the Virginia-Tennessee Valley. Merchants bartered the goods for local produce which the wagons took to the cities on their return trips. While some produce was sent by flatboat to Knoxville and Chattanooga, goods from these cities could not be sent upstream. The Cherokee Indians and mountains blocked overland routes to Charleston, South Carolina, and both Indians and Muscle Shoals were barriers on the Tennessee River for shipping goods to or from New Orleans. When steamboats began to be used from New Orleans, they could rarely cross Muscle Shoals unless the river was at flood stage. However, when steamboats began to ply between Knoxville and Chattanooga, the merchants of northeastern Tennessee began to demand that the upper Tennessee River and its tributaries be navigable. This meant removal not only of natural obstructions, but also the removal of mill dams and fish traps.

Steamboats were not practical or successful for navigation in the Nolichucky and Holston rivers. Flatboats and rafts were used for transporting goods from Washington County to Knoxville and Chattanooga. From Washington County, goods had to be hauled by wagon to Kingsport (in Sullivan County) for transport by river or loaded in Washington County for transport down the Nolichucky. Even so boats often had to wait for rainy periods when the rivers were high in order to make successful trips without becoming stalled on sandbars. These boats were sold at the end of the trip, either to persons who reloaded them and took them on to New Orleans or to persons who wanted lumber or firewood.

Demands that the rivers be made navigable exerted pressure on the Tennessee legislature. A request from the state of Virginia that David Ross' mill dam be removed from the Holston River did not result in removal of the dam,

but the legislature did appropriate \$250.00 to build a lock around it, provided Virginia matched those funds. In 1817 and again in 1829, citizens of Washington County residing along the Nolichucky River petitioned the legislature to clear the Nolichucky of obstructions, stating that the river was their main route "in the transportation of their surplus commodities, that notwithstanding the great quantity of produce annually freighted on said river, it is so obstructed with dams for fishtraps and other purposes that the safe navigation thereof is greatly injured." Several natural obstructions in the river were also mentioned in these petitions. Washington County residents signing the 1817 petition included James Sevier, James S. Johnston, John McAllister, Isaac Wilson, Benjamin Blackburn, Isaac Gann, William Clark, David Robinson, John Cole, Abm. Colyar, George Henley, John Bayless, John Clark, Adam Broyles, Daniel L. Bayless, Samuel Mock, Charles Wilson, Benjamin Copp, James Broyles, Blake Massengill, Jacob Copp, William Wilson, Joseph Crouch, Thomas J. Brown, William Colyar, Jr., Joshua Henley, Henderson Clark, Samuel Bayless, Macagah Brumit, Abraham Hartsell, Abraham Miller, John McGee, Colvin Finch, Joseph Hunter, Reuben Bayless, Adam Ingle, Charles Davis, William Bayless, William S. Erwin, David Hunter, Jacob Brown, Jr., William Brown, David G. Vance, Isaac Henley, Gabriel Brown, William Miller, Edward West, and Thomas Hampton. Signers of the 1829 petition included William Gilleland, Adam Broyles, Jr., Jacob Reser, Jr., Daniel Yeager, Daniel Dillon, James F. Broyles, Elijah Embree, John Hunter, William Williams, William Patton, John Wilhite, Samuel Wilhite, Michael Wattenbarger, Daniel Graham, Nicholas Bitner, Isaac Wilson, Ira Green, Davis Wallis, Nathan Prather, Henry Burgner, John Bailey, Samuel Mock, Samuel Mitchell, Henry Click, Alexander Gann, John Blair, Adam Broyles, Sr., Jefferson Broyles, William Collom, John McMackin, William McGee, and Alexander Mathes.

The natural barriers on both the Holston and Nolichucky were numerous. To secure improvement of rivers, a corporation was usually approved by the legislature and authorized to collect monies by subscription, lottery, or other means to remove obstructions in streams otherwise navigable. When obstructions had been removed, the company could then proceed to collect toll, but was required to keep the river navigable. The Nolichucky Company was chartered in 1801 in the counties of Washington, Green and Jefferson to keep a channel twenty feet wide and eighteen inches deep open in the Nolichucky River. The company's contract was for twenty years and covered the river from Brown's Island in Washington County to the place where it emptied into the French Broad River. Three custom houses were to be erected along the river and tolls charged for the use of the river. A similar company was established for the Holston and Watauga rivers in 1815.

None of the methods of raising money to begin these costly projects was effective. It was not until 1829 that the Legislature of Tennessee appropriated sixty thousand dollars for use in Eastern Tennessee to improve navigation. At the same time commissioners were appointed who constituted a corporation to improve navigation of the Tennessee River and its tributaries. Funds were placed in their hands by the state, but little, if any, of the money was used in Washington County. Early in 1842 the governor of Tennessee appointed Elijah Embree of Washington County, Orville Bradley of Hawkins County, Robert Massengill of Grainger County, and J.G.M. Ramsey of Knox County to supervise river improvement in East Tennessee. The aim of the group was to make improvements for descending navigation on a river above the low water mark. Only twelve thousand dollars was allotted for use on the Nolichucky River, and only twenty-four thousand dollars for the Holston River east of Knoxville.

Soon after 1826 citizens of Knoxville formed a company to build a steamboat for service on the upper Tennessee River. It arrived in Knoxville in 1831, with routes established on the Tennessee River south of Knoxville. The com-

pany placed commissioners at strategic landing places to purchase commodities from local producers and to dispose of merchandise. One was placed at Brown's Ferry on the Nolichucky, but produce purchased there had to be sent to Knoxville by flatboat, with goods from Knoxville hauled overland by wagons. The steamboat trade from New Orleans to Chattanooga and Knoxville did make it possible to obtain some goods from Knoxville during the height of the steam boat era, 1840 to 1850. By 1858 Washington County was no longer dependent on wagon or river transportation due to completion of the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad.

The Nolichucky and Holston rivers were used chiefly for transporting, by flatboats or rafts, such products as iron bars, iron utensils, pottery, and other nonperishable products. The date all such transportation ceased is not known, but it must have continued at least until the last quarter of the 19th century. According to the Tennessee Historical Commission, the Decker Pottery transported a large quantity of its products down the Nolichucky River via flatboat to markets in Knoxville and Chattanooga. This indicates that river traffic continued until the late 1800's, since the Decker Pottery was not established until 1872. By that time, the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad was taking Washington County products to market and bringing travelers and merchandise into the county. Transportation by river would soon become a part of the county's history. Today, the Nolichucky River is used by canoes and small motor boats for pleasure and for fishing. Within the past few years, rafting down scenic areas of the river has become a popular recreation.

References: Finchum, George A. *Washington County Court 1796-1836*, Master's thesis, East Tennessee State University, 1959.; Folmsbee, Stanley J. *Sectionalism and Internal Improvements in Tennessee 1796-1845*. Knoxville: The East Tennessee Historic Society, 1939.; Lay, Ebery A. *An Industrial and Commercial History of the Tri-Cities in Tennessee-Virginia*. Kingsport: Lay Publications, 1982.; Tennessee Legislative Petitions 51-1817, 127-1829, and 263-1829, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

Railroads of Washington County

Railroads first appeared in America in the 1830's. Prior to the coming of the railroads, the communities that grew and prospered were seaports or those located on inland waterways. Land transportation, consisting of animal powered vehicles, was neither economical nor dependable. The railroad could provide the transportation needed to develop the interior of our new nation; under the free enterprise system their growth and development was rapid.

In the early 1830's, there was considerable interest among the citizens of East Tennessee, including Washington County, in the possibility of building a railroad in their area. In 1831, a number of public meetings were held in various towns in East Tennessee and Virginia to advocate the construction of a railroad from Virginia into Knoxville; one of these meetings was held in Jonesborough. An agreement by Tennessee and Virginia concerning issuance of stock in this railroad could not be reached, and the project was eventually abandoned. By 1835, there was another movement, this time to build a railroad from Cincinnati, Ohio to Charleston, South Carolina. Once again, the people of East Tennessee were very interested in the possibility of having this rail system pass through their part of the state. Several meetings were held throughout East Tennessee during the winter of 1835-36 in favor of the project. At one of these meetings, held in Jonesborough in October 1835, a memorial to the Tennessee General Assembly was adopted. Signed by 600 citizens of Washington County, this petition was entitled, "The Memorial of Six Hundred Citizens of Washington County Praying the General Assembly to Pass a Law and if necessary to pledge the faith of the state to raise the funds necessary to Construct a Rail Road from the North Carolina line to the Virginia & Kentucky line to unite with the Ohio & South Carolina Railroad." Despite this early plea by Washington Countians for a railroad, it would be quite a number of years before their dream would be realized.

By 1845, there were 4600 miles of railroads in the United States operating in every state east of the Mississippi - except Tennessee! The first railroad to operate in Tennessee was the Western and Atlantic, built by the state of Georgia from Atlanta to Chattanooga. Several railroad projects in Tennessee had resulted in failure and interest was lost. Several communities were more interested in improving the state's waterways than building railroads. Other states with railroads began to prosper. Farms and factories could get their products to market, and people had a dependable means by which they could travel. In 1845, a convention was held in Memphis to consider ways and means to improve the state's commerce; the conclusion was a system of railroads. Interest was renewed with the state now offering aid. Old projects were revived and new projects begun. Middle and West Tennessee took the lead with the Memphis and Charleston Railroad and the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad, both completed in the early 1850's.

The first railroad to enter Washington County was the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad, chartered in 1849 to be built from Knoxville to the Virginia state line at Bristol. This road would form a connecting link between the East Tennessee and Georgia Railroad, entering Knoxville from Chattanooga, and the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad, being built from Lynchburg to Bristol. Construction did not get underway until 1855, with one construction crew beginning at Bristol and another building out of Knoxville.

The moving force behind the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad was Dr. Samuel B. Cunningham, a renowned surgeon and community leader in



Sevier's ford, on the Nolichucky River near Conklin, was a common crossing area for travelers before river bridges were constructed.

EMBREEVILLE - BUMPASS COVE

Embreeville and Bumpass Cove are small mountain communities located in the southeastern corner of Washington County and at the northern border of Unicoi County. The cove, lying between Rich Mountain and Embreeville Mountain, is some four miles long and almost two miles wide. Its watershed is drained by the Bumpass Cove Creek into the Nolichucky River. Numerous remains of the Cherokees, where their villages were once located, have been found at the mouth of the cove. This has been one of the richest mineralized areas in East Tennessee, a fact which throughout its history has caused years of great productivity when the mines were active, and years of idleness and financial stagnation when the mines were closed.



An 1899 photograph of the iron furnace at Embreeville, built in 1840. (Photograph courtesy of Ella Pearce Buchanan)

The first metal to be mined in the area was lead. Bullets from this source were supposedly fired against the British in 1780 at the Battle of Kings Mountain. Tax lists of the 1780's show William Colyer assessed for 350 acres of land in Bumpass Cove containing a lead mine commonly called "Colyer's Mine." In 1812 William P. Chester bought 260 acres near the mouth of Bumpass Cove and built a forge for iron ore. He later sold the forge to Elijah and Elihu Embree.

The Embrees were third generation ironworkers. Their grandfather, Moses Embree III, had served his apprenticeship as an ironworker in Pennsylvania in the late 1720's. The Embrees were active members of the Religious Society of Friends, commonly called Quakers. In the 1780's, Moses' son Thomas Embree hired a Quaker stonemason named Seth Smith to build a stone house near what is now Telford, Tennessee. Elijah and Elihu Embree lived in this house as children. This "Limestone House" still stands a few miles southwest of Jonesborough. The two Embree brothers acquired many additional acres, built forges, furnaces and nail factories, and by 1820 were widely known for their high-quality cast and forged iron products.

Elihu Embree is best known for his connection with early efforts to free slaves in Tennessee. In 1819 he published at Jonesborough, the *Manumission Intelligencer*, weekly newspaper and later *The Emancipator*, a monthly publication. These were the first periodicals published in the United States devoted exclusively to the abolition of slavery. Publication stopped when Elihu died in 1820.